

# THE 3 INVESTIGATORS in

## THE MYSTERY OF THE MISSING MAGICIAN





in

**THE MYSTERY  
OF THE  
MISSING MAGICIAN**

During a magic show in front of children, Pablo the Magician disappears into a cabinet—and does not return. Distraught, the children engage The Three Investigators to find the missing magician. Such a task is not exactly what Jupiter sees as complicated. However, it turns out to be highly dangerous when he, Pete and Bob, together with the magician's young apprentice, have to deal with a very violent adversary—who then captures them and gives Jupiter only an hour to solve a mystery from a magic trick—one that has not been solved for decades...

The Three Investigators  
in  
The Mystery of the Missing Magician

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## 1. A Trick Gone Awry

When Jupiter Jones came home after school, a surprise awaited him—the dusty compound of The Jones Salvage Yard was full of children. A group of seven- or eight-year-olds had scattered across the place. They rummaged around in the junk, climbed on old garden chairs, plucked at clothes, tried on hats and stretched their arms for stuffed animals and knick-knacks. There was a hustle and bustle like during recess at a primary school yard. Jupiter had never seen anything like it in all the years he had been living here with his uncle and aunt.

Aunt Mathilda rushed from one child to the next, almost in a panic. “Oh, would you please get off that chair?” she said to a boy who was jumping and having fun on an antique chair. Then she ran to a girl playing with a porcelain doll. “Uh... this is, how shall I say, a very valuable piece and it’s not really meant to be played with at all.” With gentle force, she took the doll from the girl.

On the way to the next emergency—two boys had discovered very close to some delicate flower vases that an old, tin dog bowl was excellent for kicking around—her eyes fell on her nephew, who was watching the goings-on in amazement.

“Jupe!” she cried, rushing breathlessly towards him. “At last. Thank goodness! I was beginning to think you weren’t coming home at all.”

“Aunt Mathilda, what’s going on here anyway—”

“Children!” shouted Mathilda Jones loudly and clapped her hands. “Come on everyone, Jupiter is here now!”

Jupiter looked at his aunt in puzzlement. “But what—”

“The little ones will tell you in a minute,” Aunt Mathilda said and watched with satisfaction as the twenty or so children dropped everything, ran towards her and surrounded Jupiter. Aunt Mathilda sighed with relief and patted Jupiter on the shoulder. “Have fun!” With that she walked away.

Jupiter was surrounded and looked irritatedly into the expectant faces. “You want to see me?”

None of the children said anything.

Then a young woman spoke up, obviously the class teacher, whom Jupiter had not noticed so far. “Well, children, you have to talk to him if you want something from him.”

“Angelina should do it, she’s the class monitor,” said a blond boy.

All the others nodded.

Then a girl with black pigtails took a step forward and cleared her throat. She pulled a small card out of the pocket of her flowered dress and held it under Jupe’s nose. It said:



Of course, that was the business card of The Three Investigators.

“We want to see you and Pete Crenshaw and...” She glanced at the card. “... and Bob Andrews.”

Jupiter grinned. “So you want to talk to The Three Investigators?”

Everyone nodded eagerly.

“Chastity and Charity said you solve cases and stuff,” Angelina explained.

Jupiter frowned. “The Kretchmer twins?”

Angelina pointed to a freckled boy. “He’s their cousin. It was his idea that we hire you.”

“Huh?” Jupiter murmured, trying to look completely serious. “Hire us for what?”

“We want you to find out where the magician disappeared to.”

Again everyone nodded.

“Where did the magician disappear to?” Jupiter repeated and turned to the teacher for help, but she was completely enchanted by her students and didn’t give him a glance. “All right, then tell me everything from the beginning. What kind of magician is he and where did he disappear to?”

Angelina sighed deeply, started to say something, but then changed her mind and took a few more deep breaths before she finally started: “So... the magician’s name is Pablo... and we were there today—the whole class... in his magic theatre... and he did magic.”

“Yes, he had a rabbit!” a boy shouted between them.

“Mikey!” Angelina complained. “I’m telling the story!” She turned back to Jupiter. “So... he did magic, and we were watching and clapping and all that. Then he climbed into a cabinet and didn’t come out again. It was really funny. So we went up to the cabinet and looked, but it was empty. The magician was gone. And now we are asking you to solve the case.”

Now Jupiter had to grin after all. “The magician climbed into a cabinet and disappeared? Hmm... that’s very mysterious, of course... but don’t you think it might have been a magic trick? We investigators do all sorts of things, but explaining magic tricks isn’t really one of them.”

Angelina shook her head resolutely. “It wasn’t a magic trick. The magician was gone—completely gone.”

“But then he suddenly came back and you clapped,” Jupiter guessed.

Everyone shook their heads.

“You didn’t clap?”

“He didn’t come back!” said Angelina. “Not at all!”

“Not at all?”

“Not at all, not at all.”

“Not at all, not at all, not at all,” said another girl.

Again Jupiter turned to the teacher questioningly, and this time she paid attention to him. “That’s really how it was,” she said. “Excuse me, I should introduce myself. I am the class



teacher Mrs Thompson. This morning my colleague Mrs Kato and I took our two classes to see Pablo the Magician in a school excursion. Everything went quite normally until the magician got into the cabinet and didn't come out again. The children got restless and after several minutes of nothing happening, we allowed them to go on the stage and have a look. We thought maybe it was part of the show. Joshua climbed up on stage and opened the cabinet door. The magician was gone and he didn't reappear. We waited another ten minutes before we left. The children were quite distraught. Mrs Kato and I thought it was a bit strange too. That's no way to end a magic show for children!"

Jupiter nodded thoughtfully. "That sounds strange indeed."

"We went back to school on the bus, but the kids couldn't forget about it, and then Daniel got the idea to ask The Three Investigators for help. That's why we are here."

"You must help the magician!" said one girl. "Maybe he made himself disappear and doesn't know how to get back!"

A few of the other children laughed, but Jupiter read uncertainty in the faces of most of them. He himself could not imagine that there was really a case behind this story, but how could he make the children understand? "Well, I don't know..."

"You have to investigate," Angelina interrupted him. "That's what it says on your card..." She held the card out again and grinned triumphantly. "See... 'We Investigate Anything'," she quoted, "so you have to!"

All the children nodded.

Jupiter sighed heavily. He saw the expectant faces, the wide eyes and the half-open mouths. Then he heard himself say: "Well, then... I guess I have to."

## 2. Pablo's Magic Theatre

"You what?" asked Pete after he had arrived at the salvage yard half an hour later together with Bob. Both had drinks and biscuits and large towels in their backpacks.

"I said yes."

"But we wanted to go to the beach today," Pete protested

"We can do that too... after we have solved the case."

Pete rolled his eyes. "And when is that supposed to be? In a week?"

"I was thinking more like an hour," Jupe replied. "We'll go there, probably meet the magician right away, ask him what he was thinking, and go to the beach straight after."

"Oh, it's as simple as that," Pete said mockingly.

"Yes, it's as simple as that," Jupe confirmed. "I see no potential for complications here."

"There's just one problem, Jupe," Pete said. "Whenever you see no potential for complications, an hour later, we'll find ourselves in very big trouble."

The First Investigator shook his head. "Nonsense. A magician was just doing a magic trick, nothing more. He chose a somewhat unfortunate dramaturgy for his performance, I admit. Leaving a bunch of distraught children behind wasn't exactly prudent. Of course, he didn't really disappear into thin air because that's impossible. So there will almost certainly be no trouble."

"I'll remind you when we're in it," Pete muttered resignedly.

"Then let's not waste any time, so we can still get to the beach after that," Bob suggested.

They were just about to get on their bikes when Mathilda Jones came running up. "Jupe! You're not going to go off again, are you? You promised me to scrape off the paint on the old doors and then repaint them."

"Oh, I forgot all about that, Aunt Mathilda. Can't I do it tomorrow?"

Aunt Mathilda was not very enthusiastic and put her hands on her hips. "You remember everything you come across, Jupiter Jones. You have a memory like an elephant, you can even recite the ingredients of cornflakes after reading them on the packet, but if I ask you to do something once, you forget it immediately!"

"I'm sorry, Aunt Mathilda, but those children that were here earlier—they had a job for us and—"

"I don't want to know that. I want you to stick to agreements." She raised her index finger threateningly.

"Tomorrow!" Jupe nodded artfully. "I promise, Aunt Mathilda."

"And it would be nice if we see you again for dinner in between." With that, she turned and sped away.

"Phew," Pete went on. "Your aunt's fuse is pretty short today, Jupe."

"We'd better get out of here before she thinks of something else," Bob suggested, swinging onto the saddle.

They set off on their way. Jupiter had found out that the magic theatre was at the beginning of Rustic Canyon in the Santa Monica Mountains, a barren mountain range. Only in the valleys, where California sycamore and eucalyptus trees grew along narrow, half-dried watercourses, was it green.

After half an hour, The Three Investigators had reached the canyon. A short, unpaved path ended at a car park. From here, only a hiking trail led further into the mountains. However, they found that they had already reached their destination, because in the immediate vicinity of the car park stood a peculiar building.

It might once have been planned as a stately home, but its current state looked as if the builders had run out of money. The walls had been completed, as had the terrace with its thick columns that should have supported the roof—only that there was no roof. Instead, someone had covered the house with a kind of huge circus tent that was open all around. It consisted of hundreds of colourful patches of fabric. The rest of the house was colourful too, as the walls were sprayed from top to bottom with garish graffiti. The only exception was a dark, wooden double door on the terrace side.

Above this door was a large sign. In self-painted intricate letters and decorated with silver stars, it read: 'Pablo's Magic Theatre'.

"Here we are," Pete said as he parked his bike in the car park where the wide tyre tracks of the school bus could still be seen.

"Impressive," Bob said as he admired the building, "and pretty wacky."

"Let's see if our magician is home," Jupiter said and climbed the three steps to the terrace.

At the door there was a silver knocker in the shape of a dragon's head with a ring in its mouth. When the First Investigator tried to operate it, the right-side door immediately swung open a little. Behind it lay cool darkness.

"Hello?" Jupiter called out.

There was no response.

Jupiter knocked another time and they waited a while.

"This building is not really big," Pete remarked. "If Pablo is here, he should have heard us."

Jupiter peered through the crack in the door. Behind it was a small anteroom. There were coat hooks on the wall to the left and right, and on the opposite side hung a heavy red curtain that was drawn.

"Do you want to just go in?" asked Pete.

Jupe shrugged his shoulders. "Why not? Maybe Pablo is hard of hearing."

He crossed the anteroom and pushed the curtain aside. A narrow staircase led up to the far end of the audience gallery of a small, deserted theatre auditorium. Jupiter looked around inside. Eight rows of seats with battered red folding chairs led down to a stage. The switched-on stage lights cast their focused beams on a black table and a large black cabinet with a mirrored door. The rest of the room was in darkness.

"Welcome to Pablo's Magic Theatre," Jupiter said as Pete and Bob stepped up beside him. His voice echoed muffled.

"It smells pretty musty in here," Pete muttered.

"Hello?" Jupiter called into the auditorium, but no one answered. "There really doesn't seem to be anyone here."

"What now?" asked Pete.

"Now we're going to check out the mysterious cabinet where Pablo is supposed to have disappeared into," Jupiter said and walked past the rows of seats down to the slightly raised stage. He climbed up and now stood in the spotlight himself. Curiously, he looked at the cabinet. Around the mirror it was decorated with silver stars and rune-like symbols.

"A very normal cabinet," Jupiter noted.

Pete and Bob also came on stage. Bob opened the cabinet door, and found that it was empty. He put his hand inside and felt the walls, but there was nothing suspicious. Questioningly, he turned to his friends. "Now what?"

"Since we have nothing more than the children's inadequate account, we have to follow up on this scanty information," Jupiter said. "I suggest we try Pablo's magic trick ourselves... Pete?"

"What?"

"Do you want to try it?"

"Why me of all people?"

"Why not, of all people?"

Pete groaned. "All right, it's always has to be me. The cabinet won't eat anyone, I suppose." The Second Investigator climbed in and turned to his friends. "Then what?"

"Now we close the door," Jupiter said. "Abracadabra." He closed the door.

Pete screamed at the top of his voice.

"Pete!" Bob cried and yanked the door open again.

Pete had disappeared.

### 3. Locked Up

Bob could not believe his eyes. The cabinet was empty, completely empty! “Pete, where are you? Pete!”

A groan could be heard from somewhere, followed by a muffled voice: “Here! Here I am!”

“Where is here?”

“Down here!”

Indeed—Pete’s voice seemed to come under the stage floor. Bob knelt down and pressed his ear to the wooden boards. “And where is down here?”

“Well, down here,” Pete said, and to Bob’s astonishment, the Second Investigator started laughing. “The cabinet has a trap door. It swung open when you closed it. I hurtled down and landed on some kind of giant cushion. You’ve got to come down and see this!”

“What’s there?” Jupiter wanted to know.

Pete seemed to be searching for words. “Everything!” he finally said. “Now come on down!”

Jupiter turned to Bob and made an inviting gesture towards the cabinet. “After you.”

“And what about you?”

“I’ll be right behind you.”

“What if we can’t get out from under there?”

“Illogical,” Jupe said. “Pablo has obviously disappeared through this very trap door. There will certainly be an exit.”

“Whatever you say.” Bob climbed into the cabinet. “Watch out down there, Pete!” he called out.

Then Jupiter closed the door. Bob gasped audibly, and when Jupiter opened the door again, his friend had disappeared as well.

Now the First Investigator entered the cabinet. “Everybody stand aside!” he shouted as a warning before pulling the door shut from the inside.

The ground folded away from under his feet. Jupiter fell, but not deeply. After only two and a half metres, he landed softly on a high cushion, as big as a bed. Above him, the trap door closed by itself. Jupiter picked himself up, crawled down from the cushion and looked around in amazement.

The Three Investigators were in a huge basement room, as big as the theatre stage above them. Sunlight filtered in narrow strips through a row of skylights just below the ceiling. Around them, there was an unbelievable mess.

Everywhere were little tables full of strange paraphernalia—top hats, gloves, crystal balls, bird feathers, candlesticks, magic wands, goldfish jars, card decks, rubber balls and scarves—silk scarves in every imaginable colour everywhere. In one corner was an animal cage filled with straw, but it was empty.

Old posters of famous magicians hung on the walls. One named Kellar levitated a young girl, another featured Houdini bound with heavy chains. Curtains were draped between the posters.

In one corner was a four-poster bed, right next to it a cooker with a sink and a refrigerator, framed by shelves of spices. An open wooden cupboard was crammed with stage costumes.

"Fantastic," Bob said, stepping through a strip of sunlight where the dust danced. "Our magician seems to live here... and work here as well. Seems like this is also his storeroom."

"Besides, someone has been rummaging around here," Jupe said seriously.

"Really?" Bob asked in surprise, taking a closer look at his surroundings. Jupiter was right—what looked like the creative chaos of a stage magician at first glance took on a disconcerting note at second glance.

"The books there are lying open on the floor, as if someone had simply swept them off the shelf," Jupiter remarked. "That box there must have been on the table. The lid fell off. You wouldn't leave it lying like that. Also, someone threw the armchair cushions on the floor."

"You're right, Jupe," Pete said. "The room has been searched."

"Do you think there was a burglar at work here?" Bob asked, taking a black silk cloth from a table and running it through his fingers.

"Possibly," Jupiter said. He pointed to a door next to the kitchen counter. "That seems to be the normal entrance, if you don't want to conjure your way down here through the cabinet." He went to the door and opened it. Behind it, a staircase led up to a basement hatch outside the building walls. The hatch was open and fresh air streamed in.

Jupiter first checked the door on both sides, but there were no signs of forced entry. "We solved the mystery of how the magician could disappear pretty quickly, but given the fact that someone has been rummaging around here, we shouldn't be too quick to shelve the case."

"I knew it," Pete grumbled. "It was supposed to be no potential for complications, but before you know it, the beach plans are cancelled."

"Postponed, not cancelled," Jupiter corrected him, "but you have to admit yourself that the 'very big trouble' you predicted has failed to materialize."

The Second Investigator wanted to say something, but there were footsteps outside the building. The Three Investigators turned and looked up the stairs. Outside the basement hatch, a stocky figure stood peering in. The face was in shadow.

Jupiter was about to speak up, but then the stranger turned and slammed the basement hatch. The First Investigator stormed up the stairs but before he reached the top, there was a dull bang.

"He threw the hatch shut!" Jupiter gasped.

Bob, who was at the bottom of the stairs, ran up and joined Jupe in trying to push the hatch open. However, it wouldn't budge.

"He must have put a bolt on it!" Bob exclaimed. Then he pounded on the hatch above his head. "Hey! Open up! Let us out! Hey!"

But no one answered.

Jupe and Bob gave up their attempt to open the hatch and returned down the stairs.

Then they heard someone running away. A shadow flitted through the sun's rays that fell into the room through the skylights.

"He locked us in," Bob said. "Do you think it was the magician? Possibly he thinks we broke in here. Or could it be someone else?"

Jupiter shrugged his shoulders. "Hard to say."

Pete sighed deeply. "I am very glad that I am absolutely wrong in my hunch that we would get into very big trouble, Jupe."

"Well," Jupiter said uneasily. "I wouldn't call the trouble very big."

“No,” Pete said ironically, “of course not.”

“You can discuss how big the trouble is later,” Bob intervened. “Right now we have to get out of here. The skylights are barred, we can’t climb through there... but there, maybe.” He pointed to the trap door above the huge cushion.

Pete climbed onto it. But even when he stretched, he could only brush the trap door with his fingertips. He took Bob, the smallest of them, on his shoulders. It was not easy to keep his balance on the soft cushion. However, Pete didn’t have to manage it for long, because Bob quickly realized that the trap door couldn’t be opened from this side.

“It’s locked into place somehow, I don’t know,” he said. “Anyway, I can’t get it open. We can’t get out from here.” He climbed down from Pete’s shoulders and said hopefully: “Maybe there’s another exit.” He pointed to the numerous curtains hanging on the walls.

“Good thought, Bob,” Jupiter said and walked towards the curtain next to the sofa, which looked most like it could hide a secret exit. He pulled it aside. In fact, there was a low wooden door behind it. “Ha!” Jupiter exclaimed triumphantly. He opened it—and found that it was a tiny toilet. “Oh,” he said and closed the door and curtain again.

Bob laughed and approached the next curtain. Behind it was not a door, but a collection of notes and yellowed newspaper clippings, pinned to an old, patterned wallpaper. The collection was dominated by an ancient, half-torn poster. On it was a picture of an elephant, and below it was written in large letters: ‘Caligarov Makes a Real Elephant Disappear Before Your Very Eyes!’

A shriek made Bob spin around.

“Pete! What happened?”

“There... there was something!” stammered Pete.

“Where?” asked Jupiter in alarm.

“Under the chair! Something moved!”

Jupiter cautiously approached the chair, which was hung over and over with clothes.

He had come within two steps when something small and white shot out from under it. Jupiter was also startled, but then he laughed.

Slowly and carefully he went to the corner where the thing was hiding, lifted it up and presented it to the others.

“A rabbit,” Pete said, breathing a sigh of relief.

Bob stroked the animal’s nose. “The poor thing was scared of us.”

“The rabbit explains the empty cage over there,” Jupe said, carried it over and put it inside. It immediately set about eating the lettuce that was stuck between the bars.

“After we have conquered the white cuddly beast of death, it is best to turn back to the search for an exit,” Jupiter said.

He went to another curtain that curved into the room on one wall and pulled it aside. Behind it, a narrow iron spiral staircase led upwards. Jupiter climbed up, but returned a few seconds later. “The stairs lead backstage. There’s another curtain. Through that, Pablo would probably have stepped back in front of his audience—if he hadn’t disappeared. In any case, that’s our exit. What do you think about—”

Pete abruptly raised his hand and silenced the First Investigator. “Do you hear that?” he whispered.

The sound of cars approached. Shortly afterwards, at least two of them stopped outside the building. Car doors slammed shut and voices could be heard. The Three Investigators rushed to the skylights and looked outside, but all they saw were black trouser legs and shoes.

“Should we hide?” asked Pete anxiously.

“No need,” Jupiter said. “I strongly suspect it’s the police.”

They heard the basement hatch open. Someone came down the stairs. Then the door was pushed open.

“Freeze!” a uniformed man yelled and pointed his gun at them. A second, a third and a fourth policeman followed and within seconds, The Three Investigators were surrounded.

“Hands behind your head and on your knees!” one of the men shouted.

“Sir,” Jupiter began, “let me calmly and clearly explain this misunderstanding—”

“On your knees!” the policeman yelled again, and before Jupiter could react he was pushed forward ungently. Someone pushed into the back of his knees, Jupiter went down, his arms were pulled behind his back and a second later handcuffs closed around his wrists.



## 4. The Magician's Apprentice

Pete and Bob were also handcuffed. Then they were led up the stairs outside to the car park, where the blinding sun welcomed them.

"Well?" the Second Investigator murmured to Jupiter. "Is this trouble big enough for you? Or would you want to wait for a bomb to explode somewhere else?"

Standing by one of the two police cars they were taken to, was a boy about their age. He was a little chubby, had auburn curls and a few freckles on his snub nose. Apparently unconsciously, he was playing with a coin in his right hand. It rolled over his knuckles, disappeared, reappeared as if from nowhere and continued its dance. He stared at The Three Investigators as they reached the police car.

"That's them!" he shouted excitedly. "Those are the three burglars I locked down there!"

"We thought so," one of the policemen replied mockingly. "There was no one else there."

"I'm happy to repeat, sir, we are not burglars," Jupiter said. "We were merely looking for Pablo the Magician."

"They've trashed everything down there!" the boy countered.

"We didn't," Jupiter said. "It was already trashed when we got there."

The policemen did not seem to be listening at all. "We'll take your personal details first," said one of them. "Can you identify yourselves?"

"I could if you took off my handcuffs," Jupiter said sourly.

"Just tell me where your ID is."

"In the back pocket of my trousers."

Shortly afterwards, the policeman had the business card of The Three Investigators in his hand. He frowned and nudged his colleague. "Say, aren't these the fellows that Cotta from Rocky Beach is always talking about?"

The other nodded. "Maybe he'd better come here."

Jupe sighed with relief. Inspector Cotta was a friend of theirs, or at least something like that. He should be able to get them out of this unpleasant situation.

The policemen radioed the Rocky Beach Police Department, and since that was not far away, Inspector Cotta's car pulled up next to them just ten minutes later. Cotta got out and strolled slowly towards The Three Investigators.

"Three teenage burglars?" he turned questioningly to the policeman who had handcuffed Jupiter. "So what do you need me for, Johnson?"

"I believe you know these three boys, Inspector Cotta," Johnson replied, "and they confirmed that too."

Cotta nodded calmly. "I sure do... but what does that matter? A burglary is a burglary, isn't it? So if the three of them were caught in the act, then you should take the next steps now."

"Inspector Cotta!" cried Pete, startled. "You know we are not burglars!"

Cotta turned to The Three Investigators for the first time. "Actually, I know the opposite, Pete. I know that you constantly and continually and at every available opportunity enter

other people's premises, trespass on private property and stick your noses into things that doesn't concern you. That's what I know."

"But we don't have anything—" Pete continued.

"You broke into this house!" Cotta thundered, and suddenly his composure was gone.

"But the door was open," Pete said meekly.

"The door was open?" sneered Cotta. "The door was open? Of course! In the eyes of the three busybody investigators, that's tantamount to a cordial invitation to walk in and have a good look around! What were you doing down there anyway? Wait, no, I don't want to know."

"We were just looking for the occupant," Jupiter explained, "and that was upstairs in the auditorium. How we ended up in his private living quarters was more of a coincidence."

"A coincidence?" Cotta repeated. "Of course! You know what? I look forward to the day when the three of you go a bit too far out on a limb. Then I will lock you up... for a week; and the next time, two weeks; and the third time for three... until you finally learn." He nodded to his colleague. "Take off their handcuffs."

Shortly afterwards, The Three Investigators were free of their shackles.

"And who are you?" the still angry inspector asked the boy who had alerted the police.

"My name is Quinn Rhymer," he said meekly and let the coin disappear. "I called the police."

"So, was anything stolen?"

"I... I don't know. I don't live here. Mr Rodriguez is just a friend of mine."

"And who is Mr Rodriguez?"

"Pablo Rodriguez, the magician," the boy said. "He owns the theatre, and he lives down there."

"Then tell Mr Rodriguez to get back to us if there was indeed a break-in, or if something was stolen. If not, please tell him to spare me. And you three..." He stepped threateningly in front of The Three Investigators. "... Will be sentenced to community service next time. Then you may collect rubbish in the city park, you have my word on that. Now march on home!" Cotta waved his hands gruffly, went back to his car and drove off.

Two minutes later, the other policemen were gone too. The Three Investigators and the boy named Quinn were left behind.

"I... I didn't quite understand what the inspector was talking about," Quinn turned to them a little shyly. "... Just that you're not burglars."

Jupiter nodded. "We are investigators. I'm Jupiter Jones and this is Pete Crenshaw and Bob Andrews. We were here because we were assigned to find Pablo the Magician—Pablo Rodriguez."

Quinn frowned. "Assigned? By whom?"

The First Investigator explained to him.

"And then we climbed into the cabinet and suddenly ended up in the basement," Pete told the end of the story. "But everything was already trashed by then. Five minutes later you showed up."

"But where is Pablo?" asked Quinn, confused. "Why would he disappear in the middle of a performance?"

"We don't know that," Pete replied.

The boy started moving abruptly and went to the back of the house. Worried, he came back. "His car is gone. None of this makes sense."

Then he pulled his mobile phone out of his pocket. After a few seconds, it seemed to go to voicemail on the other end. "Hello, Pablo, it's Quinn. Where are you? There are three boys

here saying you ran off in the middle of a show. The police have been here too. Call me back, will you?" He hung up, visibly distraught. "I don't understand."

"We don't understand it either," Bob said. "That's why we're trying to unravel the mystery."

"I'm sorry I locked you up," Quinn said apologetically. "I had no way of knowing..."

Bob waved it off. "That's all right... but you could help us."

Quinn raised his shoulders in perplexity. "I can't explain what the children said. I know the show that Pablo puts on in front of school classes. Part of it is the act where he climbs into the cabinet and disappears, but usually he comes back, of course. He climbs up the spiral staircase and comes back on stage through the back curtain. The children are always surprised. Something must have happened. In any case, since you didn't cause the chaos down there... then he might have been mugged!"

"Can you think of anyone who would have reason to do that?" asked Jupiter.

Quinn shook his head slowly.

"How well do you know Mr Rodriguez?"

"Quite well, I'd say. I'm his assistant... and his apprentice."

"You're learning magic?" asked Pete. "You had a coin there earlier..."

"Oh, you mean this..." Quinn said, reaching behind Pete's ear and suddenly having a quarter in his hand. "Or, no, probably more like this..." Now he reached behind his own ear and pulled out a second coin. He held the two coins, one on each hand between the thumb and forefinger. Then he brought them together in a flash and there was suddenly only one left. He threw it into the air—and it was gone.

Pete's eyes snapped open. Of course he had seen such tricks before, but never up close and personal. He had always thought that he would see through them as soon as he had the chance... but that wasn't the case. "How did you do that?"

"Magic." Quinn grinned wryly. "I was about twelve the first time I went to one of Pablo's shows. The theatre was brand-new then. He had bought this ruined building and done the rest himself. I was thrilled and afterwards I was on my parents' ears to come here again with me immediately... and then again and again."

"Since we don't live far away, I came here alone at some point. Pablo knew me by then and let me in for free. Then I wanted to be able to do magic myself. So I got books and started practising. When I got older, I sometimes helped Pablo during the holidays when he was tinkering with the building or something. Little by little we became friends, and he started teaching me tricks. I finished high school this year, but I'm not going to college, I want to be a magician. So now I work part-time for Pablo, organizing shows and school performances and stuff—like for the two classes this morning."

"Why are you here now?" asked Jupiter.

"I wanted to make some appointments with him. I had assumed that he was here, but then I saw you guys down there. I don't have a good feeling about the whole thing. Pablo would never stop a performance just like that! Something must have happened! I should have told the inspector. He has to do something!"

Jupiter nodded thoughtfully. "The problem is that he won't do that unless there is clear evidence of a crime. So far we're only dealing with a messy basement."

"But Pablo has disappeared!" Quinn said.

"He is merely not here, which is not a crime. You could report him missing, but it won't be followed up for a few days at least. What we have is not enough for the police to start an investigation. For us, on the other hand, it is."

Quinn looked at him questioningly. "You want to investigate? You're really serious, aren't you?"

"We have already taken the case," Jupiter said. "The question is whether you want to help us."

Quinn nodded.

"Good, then I suggest we go back to the basement and you tell us if you notice anything in particular."

They went to the basement hatch and descended the steps into the basement.

Concerned, Quinn walked through the place and looked around. "Getting in here was probably no problem for the perpetrator," he explained. "The door is usually unlocked, and the basement hatch is actually always open."

"So it could have been like this," Bob pondered. "The burglar gains access via the basement stairs while Pablo is giving his performance upstairs in the theatre. Then he performs his disappearing trick, climbs into the cabinet, lands on the cushion and surprises the burglar. A fight ensues and finally—"

"Is he being abducted?" gasped Quinn, startled.

"Or he's making a run for it," Jupe said. "You said his car was gone."

"But then he would have gone to the police!"

Jupiter slowly shook his head. "This mess doesn't look like a fight to me, but like someone was looking for something. Do you have any idea what the burglar might be after? Does Mr Rodriguez have anything of value? Or did he perhaps hide a large amount of cash here?"

Quinn shook his head slowly. "Pablo doesn't make that much money with his school shows. He can just about keep his head above water." Then something occurred to him. "But he has a secret stash! He's never shown it to me, but I once happened to see it from outside through the skylights."

"And where is this secret hiding place?" asked Pete straightforwardly.

Quinn hesitated for a moment, as if he wasn't sure he wanted to put so much trust in The Three Investigators. Then he went to the poster with the elephant. He plucked off the two drawing pins securing the bottom corners and lifted the poster. Behind it was a flap about thirty by thirty centimetres in size set into the wall.

Curious, The Three Investigators stepped closer. Quinn pulled on a small brass ring and opened the flap. A cavity appeared, just a hand span deep... but it was empty.

"Do you have any idea what Mr Rodriguez was hiding in there?" asked Jupiter.

Quinn shook his head. "I never asked him about this hiding place."

"Whatever it was, if there was anything in it at all, it's not there now." Jupiter closed the flap.

They left the basement room and returned outside.

"We'll go back to Rocky Beach and figure out what to do next," Jupiter announced. "So Quinn, if you think of anything else that might be relevant, please give us a call." Jupiter handed him their business card.

"I will. We can ride together for a while, I live in Pacific Palisades, you'll have to pass it on the way to Rocky Beach anyway."

They walked towards their bikes together. Suddenly, Quinn remembered something else. He detoured, turned the corner of the house and rummaged around between some broken flower pots that were on the ground next to the tent fixture. He pulled out a bunch of keys from between them. "These are Pablo's spare keys. He once told me this hiding place. I'm going to lock the basement door and the theatre entrance."

“Good idea,” Bob said.

Quinn locked both doors while The Three Investigators waited for him.

“I think I’d better take these spare keys with me,” Quinn said on his return, “just in case, somebody finds them here.” Then he tried to call Pablo again, but again it only went to voicemail.

While Quinn tried a second time, Bob looked down the lonely path. He wondered where the nearest neighbours lived and whether it would be worth asking for Pablo there. His gaze fell on the mountains lining the canyon, rising here from the coastal plain. Over the eastern ridge, the road wound its way towards Encino.

Suddenly the sunlight reflected off something. Bob squinted his eyes. There was a car up there, right on the hillside. A man in sunglasses sat at the wheel. He stared down at them through the open driver’s window. The lenses reflected the sunlight.

When the stranger noticed Bob looking at him, he started the car and drove off.

## 5. The Stranger in the Mirror

The Three Investigators accompanied Quinn home before continuing to the salvage yard themselves. There they immediately retreated to their headquarters.

Headquarters was the office of The Three Investigators. It was an old mobile home trailer sheltered from prying eyes by mountains of scrap metal and junk in the far corner of the compound, and could only be entered through a series of secret entrances.

An old refrigerator, which The Three Investigators called the Cold Gate, was one of these entrances. Jupiter opened the fridge door and climbed in. There, he operated a secret mechanism and the back wall swung open. Behind it, completely buried under scrap metal, was a short dark tunnel of corrugated sheet metal that led to the trailer. Pete and Bob followed behind.

In the trailer, over time, they had accumulated everything they needed for their investigation work. They had a computer and their own telephone connection, lots of detective equipment, mountains of books and files and, of course, cosy armchairs salvaged from the yard. Aunt Mathilda and Uncle Titus had at some point declared the armchairs unsaleable because of the tattered upholstery and worn-out cushions, and so they had migrated to Headquarters.

Bob now let himself fall into one of them.

“Are you really sure that the man was watching us?” Jupe resumed the conversation they had had on the way here.

“Quite,” said Bob. “At first I thought it was just a motorist who had stopped briefly to look at the theatre from above, but the way he suddenly looked away and drove off when I noticed him—that was quite striking.”

“What did the guy look like?” Pete wanted to know.

Bob shrugged his shoulders. “I have absolutely no idea. It was pretty far away after all. He was sitting in the car, wearing sunglasses, and he had... hair—light hair.”

“That narrows the circle of suspects immensely, of course,” Jupiter said dryly. “What about the car?”

“It was definitely a bit old. It was white, definitely a station wagon, and it had those ugly wood-panelled sides that used to be fashionable. I think it could be a Dodge.”

“All right,” said Jupiter. “Let’s keep this mysterious observer in mind, but let’s concentrate on something else first.”

“On what?” Pete wanted to know. “I’ve been wondering all along how we’re actually going to investigate. The magician Pablo has disappeared and we don’t have a single lead to follow.”

“No, but we have witnesses,” Jupiter said. “The two school classes.”

“You have already spoken to them,” Bob said.

The First Investigator shook his head. “Only with the one class, but there is still Mrs Kato’s class. Mrs Thompson, who was with me today with her students, gave me her colleague’s number. I’ll give her a call now.”

Shortly afterwards he had Mrs Kato on the line. “Yes?”

“Good afternoon, Mrs Kato, my name is Jupiter Jones. Mrs Thompson was kind enough to give me your number. I’m sorry to bother you, but I have a quick question for you. You went to a performance of Pablo the Magician with your class this morning, right?”

“Yes, that’s right.”

“Your colleague told me what happened there—that the magician just disappeared and didn’t reappear.”

“Yes, that’s right. The children were quite distraught. I find such a thing impossible. Who does this man think he is?”

“The thing is, ma’am, my colleagues and I are investigators and have reason to believe that Pablo’s disappearance was not planned. We are currently investigating this and that is also the reason for my call. Did you happen to observe anything suspicious or unusual—before the show, during the show or afterwards?”

“Observed anything unusual?” Mrs Kato repeated. “Hmm... no, not that I can recall...”

“Apart from Pablo, was there anyone else in the theatre who was not from your school?”

“I didn’t see anyone, but I filmed the disappearance. Would that help you?”

Jupiter listened up. “You filmed Pablo climbing into the cabinet?”

“Yes. I wanted to use this for the lesson—let the kids guess how he did the disappearing act.”

“May we see this video, ma’am? It would be a great help to us!”

“Of course, that’s not a problem.”

Mrs Kato gave Jupiter her address, and after the First Investigator hung up, he rose from the chair with a flourish. “Let’s go, fellas! We have the first lead!”

Mrs Kato lived not far away in one of the fancier suburban areas with beautiful gardens and manicured lawns. The teacher was an elderly lady, apparently only a few years away from retirement.

She invited The Three Investigators into her house and surprised the boys by switching on an ultra-flat modern laptop on the living room table and then establishing a wireless connection to her brand-new mobile phone, with which she had used to record the performance in the theatre.

“And so you three are investigators?” she asked as the data was transferred.

Jupiter nodded and was already prepared for the usual scepticism from adults. Instead, he read great openness and curiosity in Mrs Kato’s face.

“I think it’s very commendable that there are still young people who prefer to look into the mysteries of our world instead of playing computer games or doing other pointless stuff all day. A magician who disappears under mysterious circumstances—that’s a fascinating mystery!”

With a few routine clicks, Mrs Kato started the video. Curious, Jupiter, Pete and Bob leaned forward.

Pablo Rodriguez was on stage with a boy from the audience. The magician was a short, wiry man in his mid-fifties who wore a black suit. He had a moustache and grey but full hair spilled out from under a top hat and reached almost to his shoulder. His eyes spoke of enthusiasm for what he was doing.

Just then he showed the boy a stack of playing cards and placed them on the stage table. “Now you draw a card from this deck. You can choose whatever card you wish and show it to your classmates. I won’t look. Afterwards, you put it back in the deck somewhere, okay?”

The boy nodded shyly.

Pablo walked to the other end of the stage. With his back facing the boy, he demonstratively raised his hands to cover his own eyes.

The boy chose a card which he showed to the other children. It was the eight of clubs. Then he inserted the card somewhere in the middle of the deck, and put the deck on the table.

“Ready?” asked Pablo.

“Yes,” said the boy.

Pablo turned around, opened his eyes—and at that moment something unexpected happened. His gaze wandered fleetingly through the audience and briefly lingered somewhere. Suddenly his eyes widened and for a tiny moment, he looked very frightened.

Very quickly, he regained his composure, went to the table with the cards and wanted to take them in his hand. Apparently by mistake he wiped the cards off the table. Quick as a flash, he tore the top hat off his head and held it under the cards falling from the table, so that they all landed into the hat. The children laughed. Pablo playfully wiped the sweat from his forehead and reached into the hat to take the cards out. Apparently there were none left. He rummaged around in the hat with a questioning face. Finally, he even turned it over and shook it. A single card sailed out. It was the eight of clubs. The children applauded. The boy nodded in amazement and was sent off-stage with a smile from Pablo.

Again Pablo looked into the audience, again a look of fear flitted across his face. “And now, my very dear audience, I will have to change!” he announced and stepped to the large mirrored cabinet on the stage. He opened it. The wardrobe was empty, which was enough to cause amusement. Pablo pretended to search desperately for clothes in it anyway. Finally, he climbed all the way into the cabinet. The door seemed to close by itself. The children laughed, probably expecting a funny attempt by the magician to free himself.

But it didn’t happen. Nothing happened. The children giggled excitedly, but after a minute, the mood changed and uncertainty spread through the auditorium. Finally, the boy who participated in the card trick was sent back on stage by Mrs Thompson and he carefully opened the cabinet. Pablo was gone and murmurs were heard in the auditorium.

The video ended at this point.

“I stopped recording because the children were getting restless,” Mrs Kato explained, “but now that I’ve looked at it again, I’ve noticed something.”

“Pablo saw something in the audience,” Bob beat her to it. “Something that scared him.”

“Or someone,” Jupiter added.

“I see you know something of your craft,” Mrs Kato said.

“I think I’ve discovered another detail,” Jupiter said and reached for the mouse. “May I?”

“Go ahead,” Mrs Kato encouraged him.

Jupe played again the part where Pablo was busy with the cabinet. “There! Did you see it?”

Pete frowned. “Saw what?”

“Watch the door!” Jupiter advised him and went back another time.

The moment Pablo opened the cabinet door, the reflection made a sweep through the auditorium. It only lasted half a second... but that was enough.

“There’s someone standing there!” shouted Pete. “At the very back, behind the last row of chairs!”

Jupiter played the moment again, this time in slow motion.

“A man,” Bob murmured. “A tall man. It’s too dark to make out his face or the colour of his hair... but he’s got sunglasses pushed into his hair. It could be the guy who was watching us!”



“That’s strange,” Mrs Kato murmured. “I hadn’t even noticed that there was anyone else in the auditorium besides us.”

“He must have entered the auditorium during the performance,” Jupiter speculated, “and you see, there’s something else—behind the man on the wall—something white. It looks like something is hanging there, but I can’t make out what it is.”

“You’re right,” Pete agreed. “It’s just too dark on the video.”

Jupiter turned to his colleagues. “We should go to the theatre again and take a closer look at the auditorium. If we leave right away, we might still make it before it gets dark.”

“I think we should go with Quinn,” Pete suggested. “I don’t want to be caught in there again.”

“So we’ll stop by Quinn’s place and ask him to come along,” Jupe agreed.

“Keep me informed,” Mrs Kato asked as she escorted the three to the door. “I’d love to know what’s behind the magician’s disappearance.”

“We will,” Jupiter promised.

## 6. A Violent Attack

The Three Investigators set off in a hurry. The sun had just set. When they turned into the street where Quinn lived with his parents, only dark blue twilight illuminated the surroundings.

"I hope Quinn is home," Bob said. "We probably should have called."

"We'll see," Jupiter said as the house came into view.

They were heading for the garage entrance when they suddenly heard a muffled cry for help.

"There!" shouted Pete. "By the bins!"

In the shade of a thick oak tree by the roadside, two figures wrestled with each other. The clearly larger and stronger of the two held the smaller one in a headlock.

"It's Quinn! He's being mugged!" Pete cried.

The Second Investigator pedalled fast and stopped a few metres from the two individuals. The attacker only noticed Pete when the cone of light from his bicycle lamp caught him and Quinn. The man looked up startled and squinted his eyes as he was blinded.

The Second Investigator jumped off the bike and charged forward without hesitation. He was determined to take the attacker down. At the precise moment, Pete leapt and rammed his elbow against the man's chin. The man staggered back, gasping, and let go of Quinn.

"Pete!" shouted Quinn, taking cover behind the thick tree trunk. "Watch out, this guy is dangerous!"

The man stood wide-legged and with his upper body bent forward like a wrestler in front of Pete. He was about in his mid-thirties, had reddish-blond, parted hair, red stubble and fair skin. A mean grin crept across his face. He seemed to be waiting for Pete to attack him, but the Second Investigator had no such intention. The guy was a good head taller than him and had shoulders like a gorilla. Pete wouldn't stand a chance against him.

With his heart pounding, Pete waited. Then finally he heard Bob and Jupiter approaching from behind.

Blond Wrestler's expression changed. He became uncertain.

"Bob, call the police," Jupiter said.

Bob pulled his mobile phone out of his pocket.

Together with Quinn, the boys were four. Therefore, none of them expected an attack. Suddenly Blond Wrestler jumped forward, leapt towards Bob and knocked the mobile phone out of his hand. It flew through the night in a high arc and landed in a hedge.

Then the guy turned and ran off, down the street.

"After him!" Pete shouted and took up the pursuit.

Blond Wrestler was fast, but Pete was able to keep up. However, he was the only one. The others fell behind him after only a few seconds.

Suddenly, Blond Wrestler swerved to the right and cut into a turning street by running through a front garden and elegantly jumping over a fence. Pete jumped after him and knew in the same second that Bob and Juve couldn't do it. They would have to climb and thus be left behind for good.

Pete was now in the side street. A white Dodge with wood-panelled sides was parked there. Blond Wrestler pulled open the driver's door, but before he could get in, Pete was already there.

A clenched fist raced towards Pete's face. The Second Investigator just managed to dodge to the side, but the blow grazed his cheek and was strong enough to make Pete lose his balance and go down. Frightened, he backed away.

Blond Wrestler did not hit or kick him, instead he jumped into the car and started the engine without even closing the driver's door. Eventually, the door slammed shut as he accelerated and drove off with screeching tyres. The Dodge was just turning the next corner when Bob, Jupiter and Quinn came up behind Pete, panting.

"Pete!" cried Bob. "Did something happen to you?"

"No," said Pete, getting to his feet and rubbing his reddened cheek. "It's all right. He hit me, but it wasn't that bad."

"Were you able to see the number plate?" asked Jupiter.

Pete shook his head. "I did look at it but the number plate light was not on."

"It was a white Dodge Diplomat," Bob said, "with wood-panelled sides. I'm pretty sure it's the same one I saw this afternoon."

"The same driver too?" asked Jupiter.

"I'm not quite sure," Bob replied. "Perhaps. The hair colour and the hairstyle fit."

Now The Three Investigators turned their attention to Quinn. The boy was as white as a sheet and shaking. "Aren't you afraid that guy will come back?"

Jupiter shook his head. "He fled because he had no chance against the four of us. He won't show up again today."

"Perhaps tomorrow?" asked Quinn anxiously.

Jupiter shrugged his shoulders. "Possibly."

"I will not leave the house," Quinn announced immediately.

"What exactly happened anyway?" Pete asked as they slowly walked back to Quinn's house.

"I was just taking out the rubbish," Quinn explained. "Then all of a sudden that guy jumped out from behind the tree, put his hand over my mouth and put me in a headlock. He wanted my mobile phone. Little did I know that it was the guy from this afternoon. I thought it was a robbery and he wanted money. I would have given him anything not to hurt me, of course. The moment I saw your three bicycle lights come up at the end of the road, I called for help."

They reached Quinn's house and shortly afterwards, Bob found his mobile phone in the hedge. Fortunately, it had not been damaged.

Jupiter began to pinch his lower lip. "That guy must have followed us this afternoon without us noticing. What else did you do today after we followed you here?"

Quinn shrugged his shoulders. "Nothing at all. I was in my room practising magic tricks like every day."

"Then the man may have been waiting for you all this time," Jupe surmised.

Quinn had terror written all over his face. "Me? But why? What did he want from me?"

"Your mobile phone," Bob said. "I noticed the guy this afternoon the moment you left Pablo a voicemail. He must have been watching that with his car window rolled down. Maybe he suspected something, or he could have guessed who you were calling. He wanted your mobile phone so he could call Pablo."

Jupiter nodded in agreement. "A very good theory, Bob."

"But who is that guy?" asked Quinn, upset.

“We still have to find out,” Jupiter confessed. Then he told Quinn about the video recording and why The Three Investigators had come here in the first place. “We want to go to the theatre again. It would be nice if you could come with us.”

Quinn struggled with himself. He looked as if he would have preferred to crawl into his room. Eventually, he pulled himself together. “I’ll come with you. I’ll just get my jacket and tell my parents.”

## 7. Rabbit in a Noose

Ten minutes later, they had reached Pablo's Magic Theatre. Here at the end of the street, there was no longer any lighting. The silhouette of the theatre loomed before them like a huge Bedouin tent.

"I don't feel well at all," Pete murmured as they parked their bikes.

"No one followed us this time," Bob said.

"Blond Wrestler wouldn't have to follow us," Pete remarked. "He knows where the theatre is."

"But he doesn't know we're here," Bob commented.

"Still, he could be lurking around here," Pete said.

"There are four of us," Jupiter said. "He won't dare approach us."

Quinn took out the keys and opened the large double door. Together they climbed the dark stairs into the auditorium. Quinn turned on the lights.

It took them only a moment to find what they were looking for. At the back wall of the auditorium, right next to the entrance, hung something they hadn't seen in the afternoon without the lights.

Someone had taken the cord used to tie the entrance curtain together and placed it around the bracket of an old-fashioned brass lamp on the wall. A white stuffed rabbit dangled from the end of the cord. It had arms and legs like a human, only its head was bunny-like... and it was stuck in a noose.

"A rabbit hanged from a noose," Pete said. He felt himself wanting to laugh, but at the same time he couldn't. On the one hand, the image of the hanged stuffed bunny was funny and not at all threatening, but on the other hand, there was something disturbing about the combination of the innocence of a stuffed bunny and the noose around its neck.

"It doesn't always hang here, does it?" Bob wanted to know from Quinn.

Quinn shook his head. "I've never seen that rabbit before."

"Our mysterious stranger must have hung it here," Jupiter was convinced. "As a threat. The white rabbit is, after all, a kind of symbol for magic."

"But then it's a death threat," Pete said, startled.

"At least a threat of violence... and it frightened Pablo so much that he immediately took flight," Jupiter said. "But something else makes me wonder. Do you notice anything special about the rabbit?"

Pete and Bob frowned. "It's a white stuffed bunny," Pete said cautiously.

"A white stuffed bunny that looks familiar," said Jupiter. "I just don't know where from."

"Well, I've never seen it before," Bob said and Pete also shook his head in perplexity.

"Hmm..." Jupiter murmured, stepped closer to the rabbit and looked at it from all sides. Then he carefully took it off. A label was attached to a seam inside the plush ear, with the name of the manufacturer and washing instructions. "I hope I'll remember where I saw this rabbit. The best thing is to take it with us. Maybe we can trace it."

"Trace it?" repeated Pete. "You do know it's made of cloth, don't you? It didn't hobble here."

Jupiter did not respond.

“In any case, we can now put together what had happened this morning,” said Bob. “Blond Wrestler found his way to the back of the auditorium during the performance and hung up the rabbit as a threat. Pablo saw the man, took the threat very seriously and took flight through the cabinet. Only when the two school classes were gone did Blond Wrestler gain access to the basement and begin to search it. By then, Pablo was long gone.”

Jupiter nodded. “However, it wasn’t just a burglary, because Blond Wrestler obviously hasn’t lost interest in Pablo, otherwise he wouldn’t be so keen on Quinn’s mobile phone.”

As if on cue, the beep of a mobile phone was suddenly heard. Quinn frowned and pulled his phone out of his pocket. His eyes grew wide as he looked at the display. “A text message from Pablo!” he exclaimed. He opened the message and read it out: “‘Had to leave urgently. Sorry. Everything is fine, but please don’t call again. I’ll explain later. Pablo.’”

An hour later, Jupiter said goodbye to Pete and Bob in front of the colourfully painted fence of The Jones Salvage Yard. Together with Quinn, they had thought about the mysterious text message for a long time and had come to the conclusion that Pablo probably wanted to protect his young apprentice. Whatever Pablo was involved in, the less Quinn knew about it, the safer it was for him.

The Three Investigators had accompanied Quinn home and then rode back to Rocky Beach. They had taken the stuffed bunny with them. Now Jupiter walked across the dark compound of the salvage yard to the Jones family home. Through a window on the ground floor he saw the flickering reflection of the television.

Jupiter entered the house and stuck his head through the door to the living room where his aunt and uncle were watching a movie. “I’m back!”

“Jupe,” said Aunt Mathilda, reaching for the remote control and switching off the device. “Come here for a moment, please.”

Jupiter went to them and sat down on an armchair. His uncle’s gaze fell on the stuffed bunny in Jupiter’s hand and he grinned.

Aunt Mathilda, however, was in a less good mood. “Your uncle and I were just talking about how it would be really nice if we could see you once in a while. You didn’t have dinner with us again today.”

Jupe made a guilty face. “Yes, that’s right. Is there anything left?”

His aunt ignored the question. “Yes... the last dinner we had together was five days ago. All you do now is sit in your junk trailer or go out with Pete and Bob. Family life doesn’t happen at all anymore. I know you’re almost a young man, and one day you’ll do what you want anyway. Until then, we’d like to see you more regularly again, even if it’s only once a day.”

Jupiter nodded in surrender. When Aunt Mathilda was in a bad mood, the best strategy was to give in immediately and vow to improve. “All right, Aunt Mathilda. I promise.”

“You see, Mathilda,” said Uncle Titus with amusement. “In the first place, he is quite reasonable, and secondly, he’s even further from the young man than you fear.” He pointed to the stuffed bunny and his grin widened. “Isn’t he kind of cute, our Jupe?”

Instead of responding to her husband’s remark, Aunt Mathilda frowned and looked at the stuffed rabbit. “Where did you get that?”

“Oh,” Jupiter said, making a dismissive gesture with his hand. “Unimportant.”

“No, no, Jupe, really, where did you get it?”

“From a theatre,” Jupiter replied. He didn’t know what his aunt was getting at. “It’s a long story, but, as I said, it’s unimportant.”

“Strange, he looks exactly like the stuffed bunny I sold this morning.”

In the same second, Jupiter realized why the rabbit had looked so familiar to him all the time. He sat up bolt upright. “You sold a stuffed bunny just like that? When?”

“This morning—that’s what I just said.”

“When exactly?”

Aunt Mathilda rolled her eyes. “At a little after nine, right after I opened the salvage yard.”

“And do you remember to whom?”

Now Aunt Mathilda’s patience was over. “Jupiter Jones, really! Sometimes you get on my last nerve. Don’t you think you’re getting a bit carried away with your investigation work? You don’t have to treat everything you come across like a criminal case! We’re talking about a stuffed bunny here!”

“It might just be some kind of exercise for him,” Uncle Titus mused aloud. “Brain jogging—Isn’t that what they call it?”

“Do you think it’s normal?” Aunt Mathilda turned to her husband and spoke about Jupiter as if he wasn’t even there. “The boy is now asking me about stuffed rabbits. He might even ask me to draw a sketch of the customer’s face, or to take fingerprints from everyone who buys something from us in the future. Titus, I’m worried! He’s had that investigative obsession since he was a kid. I thought it would grow out of him eventually, but I’m beginning to get the feeling that it’s getting worse and worse.”

“Please, Aunt Mathilda, the rabbit is actually an important piece of evidence in a case we are working on, believe it or not. If you could remember who bought it—”

“Goodness!” exclaimed Aunt Mathilda, throwing her hands up to the sky. “Yes, I can remember. You see, he was the cheekiest customer I’ve come across in a long time. Reddish blond hair, parted, stubble, must have been one-ninety tall, athletic, mid or late thirties, big sunglasses... and he drove an old Dodge Diplomat.”

“With wood-panelled sides?”

Aunt Mathilda frowned briefly. “How do you know that? Yes, with wood-panelled sides. Anything else, Mr Master Investigator?”

Jupiter was thrilled, and yet he hardly dared to ask the next question. “You don’t happen to know the man’s name, do you? Or did you get the licence plate number?”

Jupiter expected his aunt to go ballistic, but her reaction was entirely different. She leaned forward towards him, put her fingertips together in front of her mouth and smiled treacherously. “I do indeed have an important piece of information for you about this customer, Jupiter Jones. It could lead to you finding out who he is.”

“Really?”

Aunt Mathilda nodded confidently. “But I’ll only tell you on one condition...”

## 8. Cotta Hangs Up

“There you are at last!” said Jupiter the next morning as Pete and Bob entered Headquarters. “It’s about time.”

The Second Investigator looked at his watch. “It’s only half past nine. That’s not late.”

“And yet we are already busy,” Jupiter said.

“So?” asked Bob. “Did we miss something?”

“Indeed. I found out why the stuffed rabbit looked so familiar, and the trail leads to Arthur Duckles, the used car salesman here in Rocky Beach.”

Pete frowned. “Does he sell stuffed animals now?”

“No... cars.” Jupiter told them about his aunt’s observations. “The rabbit was in one of the boxes that Aunt Mathilda has been putting outside the gate by the road in the mornings lately. Each item is only for a dollar. She was still busy getting the items out and was just stepping through the gate with another box. That’s when she saw a man who was about to get into his car which was parked next to him with the engine running. He had grabbed the rabbit—without paying. As you know Aunt Mathilda... she confronted him, and, by her own account, gave the man quite a tongue-lashing. He meekly gave her a dollar and drove off—in a Dodge Diplomat with wood-panelled sides.”

“No way!” shouted Bob.

“Yes, and it gets even better,” Jupe continued. “Aunt Mathilda keeps track of people like that so that she can keep an eye on them in case they show up again. She was therefore not only able to deliver a precise description of the perpetrator that exactly matched the man from last night, but also took a closer look at the car.”

“Did she get the licence plate number?” asked Bob hopefully.

“She didn’t, but she noticed that there were letterings on the licence plate frame—an advertisement for Arthur Duckles, the used car dealer.”

Pete clapped his hands enthusiastically and laughed. “Your aunt is really worth her weight in gold, Jupe. We should bake her a cherry pie to thank her.”

“She has other ideas,” Jupiter said, “because there was one condition she imposed on me, otherwise I wouldn’t have found out about Arthur Duckles. I have to be home in time for dinner every night, starting tonight. That’s a week of prescribed family activities.”

“It’s bearable,” Bob remarked.

“And this afternoon, I have to scrape off the paint on the old doors and repaint them,” Jupiter added. “There’s no escaping that. It’s a bit annoying, but if you help me—”

“—Then it’ll be done faster,” Bob said and turned towards the Cold Gate. “So we’d better not waste any time. Let’s go to the car dealer!”

On the way through the salvage yard, Jupiter thought again about the unknown assailant. “The man bought the stuffed animal from us yesterday morning at just after nine. The school performance in Pablo’s Magic Theatre started at ten. To me it looks like this—the purchase of the rabbit was a spontaneous decision. The man was on his way to the theatre, drove past the salvage yard, saw the stuffed bunny in a box from the car, stopped, jumped out quickly, grabbed the bunny and wanted to drive on. It couldn’t have been about saving a dollar by stealing the bunny. He simply didn’t care whether he paid for it or not. If the stuffed bunny



had been planned, he would have got it much earlier and not just an hour or so before hanging it up with a cord in the theatre auditorium. So the hanging of the stuffed bunny was presumably carried out by chance.”

“—Which didn’t fail to have its effect on Pablo, though,” Bob said.

They got on their bikes and cycled through the crisp, sunny morning to a small industrial estate of Rocky Beach, where Arthur Duckles’s dusty car yard was located under colourful banners. On the lot were about fifty cars of all different makes, from old to new and in almost every price range. Jupiter knew that Uncle Titus had also bought his pick-up truck here years ago.

Apart from The Three Investigators, three or four other customers were strolling around the yard, checking paint jobs and looking through the side windows. Arthur Duckles, a small man in stained blue overalls stretched over a substantial belly, sat in the shade of his small sales container drinking coffee.

“How do we proceed?” asked Bob quietly as they pretended to look at cars. “Are you just going to ask Duckles straight out who bought the Dodge?”

Jupiter shook his head. “Then he would reply that he cannot tell us. No, we’ll make sure he gets the idea to tell us the name of the buyer all by himself.”

“Oh, and how?” asked Pete.

Jupiter smiled. “You’ll see in a minute.”

He walked towards the container, Pete and Bob followed him eagerly.

“Good morning, Mr Duckles,” the First Investigator said cheerfully.

Arthur Duckles blinked at them without getting up. “Morning, boys. What can I do for you?”

“We have a question. There was a white Dodge Diplomat with wood-panelled sides here some time ago, wasn’t there? Do you remember?”

“You bet. It’s been sitting here for two years. Nobody wanted to buy that old thing, but a fortnight ago I actually got rid of it. Don’t tell me you were interested in that.”

Jupiter nodded sadly. “In fact, yes. The car wouldn’t have been for me, though. The father of my friend Pete here works in Hollywood. He is currently working on a movie set in the eighties. They need another car like that, and they are not so easy to find anymore. When I heard about it, I remembered that I saw a Dodge just like it here at your place.”

“Well,” said Duckles regretfully. “That was your father’s bad luck, Pete. The Dodge has been sold.”

Jupiter shook his head sadly. “So, Pete... I guess you won’t get the two hundred dollars your father promised you if you found him a car like that. What a pity! That’s exactly the two hundred dollars you are short of for that Honda over there.”

Arthur Duckles listened up. “You were going to buy that Honda from me?”

Pete, himself far too surprised by the story Jupiter told the car dealer, could only nod.

“The movie company wouldn’t even have to own the Dodge,” Jupiter continued blithely. “It would be enough if they could borrow it for a few days of filming.”

Duckles frowned. “And then you would get two hundred dollars from your father?”

Pete nodded.

“And then you’d have enough money to buy that Honda over there?”

Pete nodded again.

“I’ll see if I can help you in any way...” Arthur Duckles braced himself from his white plastic chair and entered the metal container where he had his office. Through the open door they saw him rummaging in a filing box. A minute later, he was back with them.

“The buyer’s name is Ray Layton, but I can’t find the document with his address and phone number. Maybe you can find that out yourselves. I think he lives here in Rocky Beach or at least nearby. Who knows, maybe he’ll lend you the car for the movie so you’ll have your money for the Honda.”

“Oh, that’s... great!” Pete exclaimed. “Thank you very much, sir!”

“Yes, really great,” Jupiter agreed. “Thank you very much, Mr Duckles. You’ve been a great help.”

Arthur Duckles nodded happily.

As they left the car yard, Bob shook his head in amusement. “Really incredible, Jupe... but wasn’t that also a bit... mean?”

The First Investigator shrugged his shoulders. “If we meet Mr Duckles again, we’ll tell him that Ray Layton didn’t want to lend his car.”

“Still...”

“It was a slight bending of moral principles, which in the service of a higher purpose... was on the one hand unavoidable, on the other absolutely justifiable,” Jupe said.

“What about the document with the buyer’s address and phone number?” Pete asked.

“I’m sure Duckles has the information, only that he is not willing to openly tell us,” Jupe explained. “It’s all that thing about customer privacy. Anyway, he did give us the buyer’s name, so let us get on with our work!”

As soon as The Three Investigators were back at Headquarters, they set out to find Ray Layton. But as smoothly as the investigation had gone so far, it now began to falter. In not a single Internet search engine did they find a Ray Layton in Rocky Beach or the surrounding area. After an hour, Jupiter gave up in frustration. “Now I can only think of one possibility.”

“And what would that be?” asked Bob.

“The police computer.”

“You want to call Inspector Cotta?” Pete guessed and shook his head. “He’ll never help us. Not after yesterday afternoon’s performance.”

Jupiter sighed. “That’s exactly the problem. To elicit the name of a buyer from a car dealer is one thing, but with Cotta, the case is different. He’d see right through us.” Jupiter reached for the phone, hesitated briefly, but then picked it up courageously and dialled a number.

“Who are you calling now?” asked Bob.

“Cotta.”

“But I thought—”

“I have to at least try.” Jupiter switched on the loudspeaker so that the others could listen in on the conversation. After a short ring, the inspector answered. “Good afternoon, Inspector Cotta. This is—”

“Jupiter Jones,” Cotta said resignedly, “and my day had started so quietly. What’s on today?”

“First of all, I would like to apologize to you, sir, also on behalf of my friends Pete and Bob. Our behaviour yesterday afternoon was beyond unseemly and extremely unprofessional in the context of our work as junior investigators. Of course, we would have—”

“Jupiter,” Cotta interrupted him calmly. “It’s one thing to trespass in other people’s houses, get caught and arrested in the process and then annoy me. It’s quite another thing to call me the next day and butter me up to make me feel better, when it’s actually about something else entirely. That could really annoy me further. So what do you really want?”

Jupiter swallowed. “We are pursuing a suspicious person. His name is Ray Layton. We don’t know much more about him, though. We thought you might be on the police computer \_\_\_”

“Out of the question,” Cotta cut him off and hung up.

Jupiter was so flabbergasted that he stared at the phone for seconds.

“To see you speechless for once is a rare pleasure,” Pete said. “Well, Jupe, it was a bad try.”

“I’m afraid I can’t disagree with you,” Jupiter admitted. “That is most distressing.”

“What else can we do?” asked Bob. “Maybe start a Ghost-to-Ghost Hookup? We could ask all the people we know about the Dodge. If Ray Layton actually lives in Rocky Beach or the surrounding area, maybe someone has seen the car. It’s conspicuous enough, after all.”

“That would be an idea,” Jupiter said and picked up a notepad. “The best thing is to make a list of people we can call.” The list was only half finished when the phone rang. Jupiter picked up the receiver. “The Three Investigators. Jupiter Jones speak—”

“Listen, Jupiter,” said Inspector Cotta. “Whatever you’ve got yourselves into—keep your hands off it!”

“Sir? I don’t quite understand.”

“Ray Layton. I had to fear that you are already standing with one foot in prison and the other in the grave, so I checked to see if there were any entries about him. Don’t get too excited, Jupiter Jones. I won’t tell you where he lives, but I will tell you that he is a dangerous felon. He served five years in prison for an armed robbery in Las Vegas. He’s also had a history of violence before that. What we also know is that he is prone to violent outbursts and does not shy away from brutality. He was released six weeks ago. Don’t mess with him. He’s a menace to society.”

“This is... uh... very informative,” Jupiter said.

“This is not informative, this is a warning! If you were at least a little serious with your apology earlier, you’ll keep your hands off Layton, off this magician and off this whole case! Are we clear?”

“Yes, sir.”

“Good!” And just as abruptly as in their last conversation, Inspector Cotta hung up.

“Phew,” Pete sighed. “He sounded really worried. Maybe we should keep a little distance from our Blond Wrestler after all.”

However, Jupiter’s face already showed enthusiasm and a zest for action. “Thanks to Cotta, we finally have a hot lead! It was probably an oversight that he told us where the robbery took place back then, so the information is worth its weight in gold! And did you notice that he mentioned not only Ray Layton, but also the magician? That means Cotta may have found a connection between the two in his research on the police computer. That’s very interesting! Let’s go, fellas, we have a lot of work to do!”

## 9. On the Trail of 'Blond Wrestler'

Bob, as the main person in charge of research, took on the task of finding out more about Ray Layton and his criminal past with the help of the information they had received from Cotta. Bob's father was a journalist at the *Los Angeles Times*. There was an extensive archive in the newspaper building, which The Three Investigators had often used for research purposes. So Bob set off straight away. Jupiter and Pete could not accompany him, as they had to keep Jupiter's promise to attend to the old doors.

The midday hours passed infinitely slowly. In the narrow shade of the wooden fence, Jupiter and Pete scraped off the remains of the old paint from the doors and then repainted them while wondering what Bob might find out.

After four hours he was finally back, just when the painting work was completed.

"I have exciting news!" exclaimed Bob. He was quite out of breath. "Emergency meeting at Headquarters in ten seconds!"

Jupiter and Pete dropped everything and followed Bob through the Cold Gate. When they were sitting in their chairs, Bob first took a few greedy sips from a half-full Coke bottle. Then he pulled a folder of copies out of his backpack.

"So," he said slowly and started leafing through the copies.

"Don't make it so exciting!" demanded Pete.

"Take it easy, a presentation like this needs to be well-prepared. I dug through the archives of the *Los Angeles Times*. Cotta said that Blond Wrestler had been in prison for five years. So I looked for burglaries and robberies in Las Vegas five to six years ago. You have to add the time between the arrest and the conviction. I found a lot in that long period of time, of course. I thought it was going to be a search for a needle in a haystack, because the name Ray Layton didn't appear anywhere. Then I hit the jackpot! Wait, I'll read it to you." Bob laid out a copied newspaper article while Pete and Jupiter moved closer in anticipation.

### *Magician Nightingale Robbed!*

*On Sunday night, the mansion of the famous magician Nightingale on the outskirts of Las Vegas was broken into.*

*Two armed men entered the house and stole money and valuables. Nightingale himself was not at home at the time of the break-in, but the maid Maria K. surprised the perpetrators. They then forced her at gunpoint to open the locked areas to which she had a key. "They beat me and held a gun to my head," Maria K. later told the police.*

*The perpetrators managed to escape with loot worth several hundred thousand dollars. The police have launched a large-scale manhunt.*

"Wow!" exclaimed Pete. "That's a bull's eye, though! Nightingale! I know him from TV!"

"He has had a huge and very successful magic show in Las Vegas for many years," Jupiter recalled, "but can we really be sure that Blond Wrestler was involved in this robbery?"

"We can," Bob continued. "You see, a day later, this sketch appeared in the papers. It was made from the descriptions given by the maid." Bob showed a copy around. The sketch was inaccurate, but nevertheless, Pete, who had been closest to Ray Layton, recognized the man immediately.

"That's him! That's Blond Wrestler!" Pete exclaimed. "And he got caught?"

Bob nodded. "A week later."

He picked up a third copy but did not read it out. "More precisely, two men were caught—Blond Wrestler and his partner. This article also mentions their names, at least almost—Ray L. and Steven S. A petrol station attendant had recognized Ray from the sketch and notified the police. The two were arrested and Maria K. was able to identify them."

Then Bob brought out a fourth copy. "A few months later, they were convicted of aggravated armed robbery—Ray L. to eight years in prison, Steven S. to one."

Jupiter frowned. "Why only one?"

"—Because Ray already had a sizeable rap sheet. Also, he was the one with the gun. He threatened Maria and was probably the mastermind of the whole thing. Steven S., on the other hand, did not do much up to that point."

"And why eight years?" Jupe asked. "I thought it was all only five years ago."

"Geez, Jupe, you're ruining all my tension building," Bob complained. "I haven't even got that far yet."

"Excuse me."

"For the story went even further. Blond Wrestler was convicted and went to prison, but the loot remained missing—especially cash and rare coins. Nightingale had a valuable coin collection. Steven S. could credibly assure that Blond Wrestler had taken the stolen items, but Blond Wrestler refused to reveal the hiding place of the loot. This might have been another reason why he received a significantly higher sentence than his companion."

"—But he was still released after only five years," Jupiter said.

"That was because after a few years in prison, he decided to reveal the hiding place of the loot," Bob explained. "It was then immediately found by the police in an old storage room that Blond Wrestler had rented under a false name and paid for years in advance. These extenuating circumstances led to his release much earlier—namely, six weeks ago." Bob folded his papers neatly. "End of story."

"That was very good work, Bob," Jupiter praised. "Now we already know quite a lot about Blond Wrestler alias Ray Layton. The next question is how this will help us."

Silence spread through Headquarters. Jupiter was right. All the information Bob had gathered was very interesting, but unfortunately none of it had anything to do with the missing Pablo Rodriguez.

"Blond Wrestler robs a famous magician..." Pete muttered and caught himself almost pinching his lower lip. Quickly he lowered his hand again. "... And five years later, he terrifies another magician and puts him to flight."

"Except this other magician isn't that famous," Bob said, "and not rich either. He performs for school classes and, as we know from Quinn, earns just enough that way to live on. So money can't be what Blond Wrestler was after."

"—But it's certainly no coincidence that Blond Wrestler is targeting magicians either," Jupe said, "so there must be some connection between Nightingale and Pablo Rodriguez."

The First Investigator turned to the computer and began searching on the Internet. "Nightingale... Born in El Paso, Texas," he recited an entry in a mumble. "... Was made famous by various television appearances, blah blah blah, successful show in Las Vegas for

ten years, blah blah. Hmm... nothing interesting at first glance. Let's take a look at Mr Nightingale."

Jupiter clicked on a video that the Internet search had offered him. Nightingale was a tall, gaunt man with distinctly coloured black hair. Dressed in a white suit, he strutted with a grand gesture across a glittering stage at a television show and riddled a coffin-like box with a dozen sabres. In the box, of course, stood a pretty young lady, smiling eagerly as she appeared to be pierced by sabres.

The Three Investigators watched the trick to the end. Jupe was about to stop the video when Nightingale announced the next act: "And now, ladies and gentlemen, please give a round of applause for my lovely assistant—the wonderful... the unique... the beautiful Cynthia!"

The stage darkened, a spotlight came on. Instead of a long-legged, permanently smiling lady in a sequin costume, an elephant entered the stage in the cone of the spotlight. The audience was thrilled.

Nightingale fooled around a bit with Cynthia, the elephant, made her stand on her hind legs and rewarded her with peanuts. Then he announced that he was now going to make her disappear. A human assistant brought in a huge white sheet. Nightingale had to climb onto a platform to even reach high enough. He threw the white fabric over Cynthia, stepped once around the elephant, waved his hands a little and pulled the cloth down with a jerk. It slid to the ground in a shimmering cascade of silk. The elephant had disappeared! The audience cheered and Nightingale bowed. At this point the video ended.

"Cool," said Pete. "How did he do that?"

"He did magic," Jupiter replied with a wink.

"Nonsense," Pete countered. "It must have been a trick."

"Well, it was a trick then."

"Guys, it doesn't matter now," Bob said excitedly. "Didn't you notice anything?"

Jupiter frowned. "What?"

"Well, the elephant!"

"What about it?"

"Nothing at all. But Pablo has this old poster hanging in his theatre basement—the one behind which was his secret hiding place. It was an advertising poster for a magic show a hundred years ago, and it says something like: 'Watch the Great Abraxas conjure away an elephant in the flesh before your very eyes!'"

"You're right!" said Jupiter. "Except that the magician's name wasn't Abraxas. It was Caligarov."

"Maybe. In any case, he also made an elephant disappear!" Jupiter turned back to the computer screen. "It says here that Cynthia the elephant is a crowd favourite. Nightingale has been performing with her for many years. His making her disappear is one of his most famous acts."

"Do you think it's a coincidence?" Bob turned to the others.

"One Blond Wrestler, two magicians," Pete muttered. "One makes an elephant disappear, the other has a poster of that very trick hanging on the wall. Could be a coincidence. Could also be a clue, although I have no idea where it should lead."

"Maybe we should look at the poster again," Jupiter said, "and talk to Quinn. Maybe he can make a connection between Nightingale and Pablo... and we should talk to Nightingale as well."

Pete laughed out. "With Nightingale? Do you know how famous he is? It's like trying to talk to the president. You'll never get near him."

However, Jupiter was wildly determined. “We’ll see about that.”

## 10. Nightingale the Magician

Jupiter suspected that it might take longer to get Nightingale on the phone, so The Three Investigators decided that Pete and Bob should go to Pablo's Magic Theatre by themselves.

The two had hardly left Headquarters when Jupiter tried his luck. It was not difficult to get hold of Nightingale's management. However, Jupiter suspected that he would be turned down immediately if he didn't have a convincing story. So he pretended to be a journalist in a disguised voice and asked for an interview with Nightingale. The secretary suggested setting up an appointment a few weeks later. Then Jupe dropped the name of the paper he was supposedly writing for and the keyword 'cover story'.

"Oh, if that's the way it is," the secretary fluted fondly. "I'll see what I can do in a minute."

Jupiter had gambled that the magician would not miss out on a cover story in one of the country's best-known magazines—and he was right.

Less than half an hour later, he had the famous magician on the other end of the line.

"Nightingale here. How are you?" he asked in a frank and cordial chatty tone.

"Great, Mr Nightingale. My name is Jupiter Jones. Thank you for taking time for me at such short notice. Let me get straight to the point. I'm on the trail of an unusual story in which you play a somewhat significant role. Among other things, it's about the break-in at your house five years ago."

Nightingale was irritated. "My secretary was talking about a cover story..."

"Oh, sure, sure," Jupiter hurried to say. "A quite extraordinary cover story, even! I'll explain it to you, but let me start with a question—does the name Pablo Rodriguez mean anything to you?"

Nightingale's irritation was mixed with slight annoyance. "No, I don't know any Pablo Rodriguez. Tell me, are you sure you're not wasting my time?"

"Quite sure, Mr Nightingale, I'll explain. The name Ray Layton is familiar to you, isn't it?"

"Ray Layton is the man who robbed me back then. I still don't understand..."

"There is one thing you may not be aware of," Jupiter interrupted him. "Ray Layton has been at large again for a few weeks, and he threatened a magician named Pablo Rodriguez. Rodriguez fled in fear of Layton and has been untraceable ever since. I wonder now what Layton wants with Rodriguez, and the connection to you seems to me to be a promising lead."

"The connection to me?" repeated Nightingale, now blatantly annoyed. "Forgive me, but there is a misunderstanding. Firstly, there is no connection with me; and secondly, I only agreed to this impromptu interview because my management was talking about a cover story that was about me, not about some petty criminal who happened to break into my house."

"But it's about you," Jupiter quickly assured him, "because this petty criminal didn't break into your house by chance. Ray Layton seems to have it in for magicians. In your case, money and a coin collection tempted him to break in. However, Mr. Rodriguez is not a wealthy man. In his case, there must be some other reason—perhaps something you have in common with Rodriguez."



“But I don’t know any Rodriguez,” Nightingale growled, “and I’m not interested in him either. I have more important things to do now.”

“There’s this poster,” Jupiter said quickly, as it sounded as if Nightingale would hang up any second. “It’s hanging in Mr Rodriguez’s premises. It’s an event poster, just under a hundred years old, by a magician called Caligarov. He made an elephant disappear—just like you.”

“Yes, and so?”

“I thought that the common ground might be there.”

Nightingale did not answer and Jupiter was already afraid that the magician might have ended the conversation... but then he asked threateningly: “Are you insinuating that I stole the trick?”

“Excuse me? No, absolutely not.”

“For a magician like me, it is really no problem to make an elephant disappear. I was merely inspired by Igor Caligarov’s handbook.”

“Of course, Mr Nightingale. So you... you have Caligarov’s handbook?”

“Caligarov’s handbook! So that’s what we’re talking about all the time, isn’t it?”

“I... I don’t quite understand.”

“You understand very well, Mr Jones,” Nightingale replied angrily. “I bought Igor Caligarov’s handbook at an auction many years ago. I collect old magic paraphernalia, not to steal tricks, but for inspiration. Do you understand the difference?”

“Of course, Mr Nightingale. I never claimed you stole anything.”

“That’s what I would have told you too.”

“But this handbook is now no longer in your possession?”

“No! Geez, are you even listening to me? I thought you were researching this story! Layton stole it from me in that robbery back then! When he revealed the hiding place of the stolen loot years later, everything he stole from me turned up—the coin collection, the money—everything, except for Igor Caligarov’s handbook. When Layton was asked about it, he said he couldn’t remember the book at all. Now what that has to do with this elephant poster at your Mr Rodriguez’s place, I don’t know... and I don’t care. In any case, I didn’t steal the elephant trick, even if it was in the handbook. If you claim otherwise in your article, you will hear from my lawyers. Now I’ve had enough, Mr Jones, have a nice day.”

“I have one last question!” Jupiter said quickly and continued before Nightingale could object. “What’s the deal with this Igor Caligarov anyway? Who was this man?”

“My goodness! Do me a favour—do your homework before you harass your fellow man next time,” Nightingale was indignant. “Igor Caligarov is the biggest fraud among magicians! Now if you’ll excuse me, I have work to do.” Without another word, Nightingale hung up.

While Jupiter was on the phone with Nightingale, Pete and Bob picked up Quinn. Now they were on their way to the theatre together. They kept a watchful eye out for the Dodge Diplomat.

“Since the attack last night, I feel like I see that guy lurking around every corner,” Quinn confessed, looking around continuously on the bike.

“By the way, he has a name,” Bob said. “Ray Layton. Does that mean anything to you?”

Quinn shook his head. “Never heard of him.”

“And what about Nightingale?”

“You mean the magician?”

Bob nodded.

"I know him from television, of course."

"Can you think of any connection between him and Pablo? Or did the two of them perhaps meet in person?"

Quinn shrugged his shoulders. "Not that I know of."

Pete and Bob tried not to let their disappointment show. They reached Pablo's Magic Theatre and first looked around attentively. No one seemed to be around.

"I think the coast is clear," Pete said. They went to the back of the building, descended the stairs under the basement hatch and entered the basement.

Quinn went to the rabbit and spoke quietly to it, giving it fresh water and food. Meanwhile, Pete and Bob looked at the poster with the elephant. It said:

*Caligarov Makes a Real Elephant Disappear  
Before Your Very Eyes!  
St. George's Hall, London, 12 October*

Pete scratched his head in perplexity. "Now what? What does this tell us?"

"Nothing," Bob confessed.

They looked at the assortment of notes and newspaper cuttings draped around the poster—leaflets, advertisements and newspaper articles. Everything was revolved around Caligarov's performances—"Igor Caligarov in Paris", "Igor Caligarov in Berlin", "Igor Caligarov in Vienna". Next to it was a small handwritten list on which the magician's appearances were listed in order, including the hotels he had stayed in at the time. The list covered a period of two years. On a map of Europe, the locations of his appearances were marked in red. Above it all hung a detailed drawing of a crown set with red gems. What it had to do with the rest was not clear to them.

"Do you know what this Igor Caligarov is about, Quinn?" asked Bob.

Quinn, still crouching by the rabbit, shrugged. "This obsession of Caligarov is a kind of hobby of Pablo's. He often stood in front of that pinboard and dabbled in it. Why? He never told me."

"What about that crown?" Bob asked. "Does it represent something?"

"I have no idea," Quinn replied.

Bob was frustrated. He had hoped to find a lead down here, but maybe the elephant trick was just a coincidence and there was no connection at all.

"How did he do that?" muttered Pete, his eyes fixed on the elephant poster. "I mean, how did he make the elephant disappear?"

"Who—Nightingale or Caligarov?" asked Bob.

Pete shrugged his shoulders. "Both of them."

"Oh, it's quite simple," Quinn said.

Pete laughed. "Simple? What's simple about it? Can you make an elephant disappear?"

"If I had one, I could," Quinn claimed.

"I don't believe you. How is that supposed to work?"

Quinn grinned wryly. "Magic. Do you want me to show you? I could make Houdini disappear."

"Who?"

He pointed to the rabbit. "Houdini."

"Okay." Pete nodded.

"Then we'd best go upstairs," Quinn said. "A good magic trick needs a real stage."

Quinn took the rabbit out of the cage. They hurried up the spiral staircase to the stage. Quinn switched on the lights and sat Houdini on a little black table while Pete and Bob took their seats in the front row.

“So Pete... do you believe that I can make this rabbit disappear?”

The Second Investigator shook his head vigorously.

“Then watch carefully!” Quinn stroked Houdini’s ears, then placed a white square cloth over the animal. With his eyes closed, Quinn massaged his temples as if concentrating hard. Then, all of a sudden, he took a quick step forward and pulled the cloth away.

Houdini had disappeared!

## 11. Invisible but Still There

The rabbit was gone. Simply gone.

Pete could not believe his eyes. “Where is it?”

“Conjured away,” Quinn said.

“No, I mean, where is it really?”

Quinn just shrugged.

“Can you conjure it back?”

“Hmm... let’s see,” Quinn murmured, putting his finger to his lips and pacing thoughtfully. “How could I bring Houdini back? It’s not that easy...”

Then Quinn calmly walked past the front of the little table, and suddenly, there it was—the rabbit was back! It sat snuffling on the table top as if it had never been gone, conjured up in the tiny moment when the table had been covered by Quinn’s body.

“I don’t believe it!” cried Pete, jumping up and climbing onto the stage. “I looked closely! But I didn’t get it. What about you, Bob?”

Bob shook his head.

Quinn smiled proudly. “I could do that with an elephant if I wanted to—conjuring away, at least. Conjuring back is a bit more difficult.”

Pete frowned and thought hard about this sentence while they went back downstairs. However, he still couldn’t figure out how the trick was done.

“Quinn, please,” he finally pleaded. “I know magicians don’t reveal their tricks, but we’re investigating a case here! And as stupid as it sounds—Nightingale’s disappearing elephant is our only connection so far!”

Bob nodded affirmatively. “It’s really true, Quinn. It could be that Blond Wrestler is after this trick.”

“I don’t think so,” Quinn contradicted. “Anyone can do it.”

Pete raised his eyebrows. “Really?”

“All right,” Quinn struggled. “I’ll tell you the solution, but only because it’s not much of a secret anyway. I’ll show you the trick again, but down here... Just a moment...” He put Houdini on a chair and hurried upstairs to fetch the white cloth. Then he put it over the rabbit. With a quick flick, he pulled the cloth away. Houdini was still sitting on the chair, but covered with another cloth, a black one.

“Well?”

Bob was the first to understand. “There’s a black cloth hidden under the white one! Here on the chair, you can see it immediately, but up on the stage it’s invisible because it is camouflaged against the black background!”

Quinn nodded. “The rabbit is there all the time—just not visible. It’s all a matter of background and lighting... and you have to practise a bit, of course, so that the black cloth stays put when you pull the white one away.”

“That’s quite simple,” Pete said, almost a little disappointed.

“Told you so.”

“And how did you conjure it back?” Pete continued.

"I pulled the black cloth away in a flash and made it disappear as I walked past the table. You can do that with a rabbit. With an elephant, the audience could see it. That's why it's more difficult to conjure it back."

"Great," thought Bob. "Unfortunately, that doesn't help us in our investigation either."

"Hmm..." Pete murmured and slowly walked towards the poster on the wall. "Maybe so, but I've just had an idea. This trick with the rabbit, it basically works in such a way that you only think the rabbit has disappeared... but actually it's still there—just not visible. Right?"

"Right," Quinn confirmed.

Pete took out the lower tacks from the poster and lifted it to reveal the flap in the wall. "What if it's the same here? Pablo has a secret hiding place... but why would a magician need a secret hiding place? He could just make what he wants to hide invisible."

Bob frowned. "Quinn just showed us that this only works if the background and lighting are right."

"Exactly," Pete confirmed, opening the flap and pointing into the opening. "Background—black, illumination—dim... If I were a magician, I wouldn't just put my valuables in a secret compartment. I would 'conjure' them away—make them invisible."

Pete bent down and shone the screen of his mobile phone into the opening. On the far wall of the compartment was a small metal hook. It was also black, so that even with the light on, it could hardly be seen. Pete pulled on it and suddenly the back wall of the secret compartment opened like a door. Behind it was a second secret compartment.

"Ha!" The Second Investigator exclaimed triumphantly.

"Pete!" cried Bob in surprise. "That... that..."

"... You didn't think I could do it?" Pete grinned. "Well, you can see for yourself. The only unfortunate thing is that Jupe isn't here. You have to promise me that you'll tell him exactly how it was—I found the secret hiding place! And I figured it out by pure thought! By thinking! Me! And no one else!"

He put his hand into the second compartment. His fingers felt an object, and he took it out. It was a rectangular something wrapped in a red piece of velvet. Pete cradled it in his hands. "Feels like..." He flipped the velvet aside. "... A book."

It was narrow, bound in thin, brittle and greasy black leather. Pete carefully took it in his hand and looked at it from all sides. The outside was completely unmarked. He opened the first page. It was handwritten in squiggly letters: 'Igor Caligarov'.

The Second Investigator began to leaf through the book. It was about two-thirds full. On almost every page, there were drawings of mostly strange devices full of springs and rods and hinges. Alongside them were notes in English, written in a delicate handwriting that Pete could hardly decipher.

On one of the pages, Pete saw a drawing of an elephant covered by a cloth. Without reading the accompanying text, he realized that it was the description of the trick Quinn had shown them with the rabbit.

"So, it's a handbook that once belonged to Igor Caligarov," Bob remarked. "Interesting. Did you know Pablo had it?"

Quinn shook his head.

"It looks like we should look more closely at this Caligarov."

Suddenly they heard shouting from outside. Someone called for help!

Bob rushed to the skylight and peered out. "There are two men fighting!" he shouted, startled. "On the footpath! They're fighting! That's—that's Blond Wrestler! He's kicking another man!"

## 12. Jupiter Picks up the Trail

“We have to do something!” shouted Pete. He quickly put the book back in the secret compartment, closed it, shut the outer flap and dropped the poster over it. Then all three ran to the door and up the stairs to the outside.

The fight took place at the beginning of the trail. A man was lying on his stomach in the dry grass and screaming. Blond Wrestler squatted on his back and continued to beat his victim.

Suddenly he lifted his head and noticed Pete, Bob and Quinn. They ran towards him. Immediately he let go of his victim, jumped up and fled into the forest.

It took the boys a few more seconds to reach the man lying on the ground. In the distance, only the cracking of Blond Wrestler’s footsteps could be heard in the undergrowth. They could no longer see him between the dense trees.

“Goodness,” Pete gasped. “We’re not going to get him!”

Bob had bent over the man. “Are you hurt?”

The stranger was about in his early forties, short and slender. He had light brown hair and wore thick glasses that had slipped half off his nose. He was wearing sports clothes and there were Nordic walking poles beside him.

Confused and shocked, he looked at the boys, scrambled up and leaned against a tree trunk. “Thank you! Thank you!” he moaned. “I thought I was here all alone. If you hadn’t come, that guy would have killed me!”

“What happened?” asked Bob.

“I... I don’t know exactly myself. I was walking through the canyon—exercising, you know.” He pointed to the two sticks. “All of a sudden, there was a rustling in the brush beside me. There was a guy crouched behind the log there, watching this big building... or the circus tent or whatever it is. He had binoculars in his hand.”

Pete, Bob and Quinn exchanged worried glances.

“I approached him. ‘What are you doing?’ I asked... but he just told me to go away. I said that I would call the police right away if he didn’t stop spying on houses. Then he suddenly jumped up and lunged at me. This guy is brutal! If it hadn’t been for you...”

He broke off and struggled for breath, seeming to fight down his fear. It took a while for him to calm down.

“You have to report the guy,” Bob said firmly. “It just so happens that we know who he is.”

“Really?”

Bob nodded. “His name is Ray Layton, and he was probably here because of us. You need to go to the police. We can testify as witnesses.”

The man thought about it for a moment, then nodded resolutely. “I will. Such a brutal guy belongs in prison!”

“That’s where he came from.”

Quinn helped the man when he started to stand up. For a moment, he still looked dazed and leaned on Quinn, but then he straightened up and picked up his walking sticks. “I’m going to the police right now.”

“We will accompany you,” Pete suggested.

“There’s no need to. My car is just back there at the end of the road.”

“Then we’ll accompany you there,” Pete said, and they did.

After the man got into his car, he turned to the boys again. “Maybe you can tell me your names in case the police want to talk to you.”

Bob nodded and gave him their business card. “You’d better tell the policemen to get in touch with Inspector Cotta from Rocky Beach. He’ll be able to do something with the name Ray Layton and act quickly.”

“Thank you very much. Thank you for your help!” He drove off and they watched him until he went around the next bend.

“So, now I want to know what Blond Wrestler was able to observe in the first place,” Bob said and they returned to the spot where Ray Layton was hiding. Bob peered past the tree trunk at the theatre. “Oh no,” he said.

“What’s wrong, Bob?”

“You can see through the skylights into the basement. You can’t see much, of course, but with binoculars...”

“You mean he saw us find the book?” asked Pete, a terrible foreboding rising in him, “and we didn’t lock the door!”

The Second Investigator didn’t waste a second and ran. He had already reached the basement when Quinn and Bob stumbled down the stairs. Pete lifted the poster, opened the flap and then the second secret compartment.

It was empty. The book was no longer there!

Immediately after Nightingale hung up abruptly, Jupe sent a text message to Pete to tell him that he will be cycling to meet them at the magic theatre. Then he set off from the salvage yard, and pedalled faster than usual, eager to tell his friends all the exciting news.

He had almost reached Rustic Canyon when a white Dodge Diplomat with wood-panelled sides came towards him. Instinctively, Jupiter lowered his gaze and inconspicuously looked to the side until the car had passed him. Out of the corner of his eye he recognized Blond Wrestler at the wheel. As soon as he was reasonably sure that he was no longer in the rear-view mirror, Jupiter turned around and chased after him.

Jupe rode as fast as he could. He knew he had little chance of catching up with the car, but if he could at least figure out roughly the direction Blond Wrestler was going...

The Dodge reappeared. It was at a stop sign and cross traffic was passing. Jupiter leaned over the handlebars and gave it his all. Just then the Dodge started up again. Jupiter prayed that he wouldn’t have to stop at the stop sign too, and he was lucky—the road was clear.

The path led through a large residential area of Pacific Palisades. The many cross streets slowed down Blond Wrestler. Luckily it was slightly downhill the whole time, so it was an advantage for Jupiter. Nevertheless, his lungs were burning after a short time and he had the feeling that he would not be able to keep up this pace for much longer.

Suddenly, the car’s left indicator flashed and it turned. Jupiter took advantage of a gap in the oncoming traffic and rolled behind at barely reduced speed. The Dodge had stopped at the right-hand side of the road. Jupiter braked so hard that his bike started to lurch. The driver’s door opened and Blond Wrestler got out of the car not thirty metres in front of him. Jupiter jerked the handlebars around and pulled into the nearest garage driveway, two houses away from the Dodge. In the driveway stood a boy of about ten, dribbling with a basketball. With screeching tyres, Jupiter came to a stop directly in front of him.

The boy looked at him with wide eyes without stopping dribbling. "Who are you? Are you here to see my sister? She's not at home."

"Oh yeah?" gasped Jupiter. "What a pity. Perhaps I could wait for her here." He squinted at the road. A hedge gave him some cover.

Blond Wrestler walked towards a small house, unlocked the door and went in.

"Say, aren't you feeling well?" the boy asked, half worried, half annoyed.

"Uh, yes. Give my regards to your sister!" Jupiter turned around on his bicycle and let himself roll onto the street. As slowly as possible, he rode past the house where Blond Wrestler had gone. It was a small house, barely wider than the neighbouring garage. By the road, the mailbox stood on a wooden post. Jupiter squinted his eyes and could decipher the name as 'Sullivan'.

Staking out the house in broad daylight was too risky, so the First Investigator made his way to Rustic Canyon. He hadn't gone far when his mobile phone rang. Jupiter pulled over. It was Bob.

"Bob, what's up?"

"Are you still on your way to the theatre?" asked Bob.

"Yes," Jupiter replied, "but I need another quarter of an hour."

"You can turn around. We have left the theatre and on our way back to Rocky Beach. Meet at the salvage yard! See you soon!"



### 13. The Blood Tiara

Half an hour later, The Three Investigators were sitting at Headquarters exchanging news.

"I found the handbook! Me!" cried Pete. "But then I was too stupid to remember to lock the door."

"Don't feel bad, Pete," Bob said. "We were all too stupid."

"That's no excuse," Pete said.

"How could you have guessed that Blond Wrestler would be so brazen as to enter the theatre directly after his attack on the walker instead of fleeing," Jupiter said. "I don't blame you. A human being was in distress—I would have forgotten about the door too."

"The book is gone," Pete said sullenly. "I make a discovery once and then it's worth nothing."

"Not really..." said Jupiter. "It is very much worth something. In fact, it is highly revealing. Besides, the book is not really gone, because at least we know where it is."

"How do we know where it is?" asked Pete uncomprehendingly.

"Because I know where Blond Wrestler is." And then, Jupiter told about his adventure.

"Madness!" cried Pete. "Then we'll have to get the book back!"

"But we had better wait until the police shows up at Blond Wrestler's," said Bob. "Our walker wanted to report him right away. That means they'll send some people to his house and arrest him temporarily, wouldn't it?"

"Possibly," Jupe said. "However, it wasn't his name on the mailbox, but the name 'Sullivan'. Maybe that was his partner in the Nightingale robbery. There was talk of a 'Steven S.' in the papers, wasn't there? 'S' for Sullivan. In any case, it's quite possible that Blond Wrestler is not registered at this address."

"He could just be visiting this Sullivan guy," Bob mused.

Jupiter shook his head. "He had his own key, but that doesn't mean the police know where he is."

"Then we'll call Cotta and tell him," Pete said. "Maybe his mood will improve then."

"First, though, I want to know why you said that the discovery of the book is 'highly revealing', Jupe," Bob said.

Jupiter leaned back in his chair with relish. "This is a longer story. Get ready for something."

"Uncle Jupe's story time," Pete remarked. "We're excited!"

The First Investigator told his friends about his telephone conversation with Nightingale. "When he called Igor Caligarov the biggest fraud among magicians, I naturally pricked up my ears. He didn't tell me much, though, but soon hung up. I read the rest on the Internet. Igor Caligarov was a fraud mainly because his reputation was based on a pack of lies."

Pete and Bob looked at each other, puzzled. "Okay, now you have our full attention," Pete said. "Go on!"

"Caligarov quickly made a name for himself as a magician in Europe in the 1920s. Supposedly he came from Russia and had performed there at the court of the tsar before going to the West after the revolution. He had shows on all the big stages in Europe and soon moved in the highest circles. Magic was insanely popular at the time. Everyone wanted to see

him because his performances were spectacular, and soon he was giving exclusive magic shows to the European high nobility and the richest of the rich.

“His last performance took place at the wedding of Leonore Stahl, the youngest offspring of a wealthy industrialist family. The wedding was a major event worth millions with hundreds of guests. Leonore Stahl was fond of magic and she had wanted Igor Caligarov to perform at her wedding. He was engaged, completed his programme, including an elephant by the way, and finally invited Leonore to join him on stage. There he asked her for her tiara...”

“Tiara?” repeated Pete.

“Yes,” Jupe continued, “a kind of jewelled crown or headband often worn by ladies in noble circles.”

“Oh, a glitter headband of some sort!”

Jupiter nodded. “A glitter headband—exactly.”

“Was this Leonore Stahl of noble status?” asked Bob.

“No, but her family had enough money to pretend,” Jupe replied. “So Caligarov asked Leonore to take off her tiara. She did and gave it to him. Caligarov made it disappear under a cloth, but of course, conjured it back a minute later. Everyone applauded and at some point, the show ended. When Leonore returned the tiara to the safe the day after the wedding celebrations, she noticed that it was not the real thing, but a fake.”

“You mean Caligarov switched them during his show?”

Jupiter nodded. “The suspicion was confirmed when Caligarov could no longer be found. He had left the country the night after his performance and disappeared without a trace. Of course, he was searched for immediately. The newspapers pounced on the story and soon, half of Europe was searching for the magician... but Caligarov remained missing. They tried to track him down by finding out more about his past. It soon became clear that there was no past at all. A man named Igor Caligarov had never existed at the Russian tsar’s court, and there was no other evidence of his existence either.”

Pete frowned. “I don’t get it again.”

“The man who had called himself Igor Caligarov had been an impostor,” Jupe continued. “He was undoubtedly a brilliant magician, but the adventurous stories about his appearances before the tsar and his escape from the revolution were all lies. He had created this dazzling identity for himself and peddled it in the fine societies of Europe. He had wormed his way into the highest circles and played his role perfectly for two years... and finally he got what he wanted. He disappeared and was never seen again. Neither was the tiara. For years, people tried to find out under which identity Caligarov had lived before, or which identity he assumed afterwards, but Igor Caligarov disappeared from the face of the earth. That’s why Nightingale called him the biggest fraud among magicians. His very existence was a fraud.”

“Do you think he was after the tiara all along?” asked Bob.

Jupiter shrugged his shoulders. “One can only speculate about that today. Perhaps any piece of jewellery would have been just as fine for him. He just had to have enough time to have a fake made. With the tiara of Leonore Stahl, however, he had hit the bull’s eye. It is also called the ‘Blood Tiara’ because, among other things, it is set with eight red diamonds. These were cut from one of the largest red diamonds ever found—the ‘Star of the Namib’. As red diamonds are the rarest diamonds of all, they are of course particularly valuable.”

“Wait a minute,” Pete said frowning. “Red diamonds? Tiara? There’s a picture of that thing on Pablo’s pinboard, isn’t there? Above the elephant poster and all the other stuff.”

“You’re right, Pete.” Bob nodded thoughtfully. “I had been wondering all along what that crown had to do with the rest, but now it makes sense. Pablo was looking for the Blood Tiara!

That's why he had all those notes about Caligarov. He was trying to find out where Caligarov had disappeared to, and with him the tiara."

"It would definitely be worth it," Jupiter said, "because the Blood Tiara is one of the most valuable pieces of jewellery in the world."

Bob stood up and went to the bookshelf that stood against one wall of Headquarters. Here The Three Investigators kept a respectable collection of reference books. It was somewhat unsorted, but after a short search, he found the book he was after.

"*Famous Gemstones and their History*," he said, pulling out the volume. "Wasn't it worth my while to take this book from the public library when it was due to be weeded out? Let's see if there's anything in here about the Blood Tiara."

He sat down again and leafed through the volume. "The Excelsior... the Koh-i-Noor... and here, the 'Star of the Namib'—it comes from Namibia, and is one of the biggest red diamonds in the world. It was split into eight pieces, which were incorporated into the famous Blood Tiara. The Blood Tiara was stolen at the wedding of Leonore Stahl and has since been considered lost. The 'Star of the Namib' can be found in the chapter 'Red Diamonds'. There are also the 'Moussaieff Red', the 'Kazanjian Red' and the 'DeYoung Red'. Another famous piece of red diamond jewellery is the 'Aurora Necklace', owned by a European royal family."

"When you cut a big diamond into eight small ones, I think that's a strong piece," Pete said. "Why does one do such a thing? It's a disgrace!"

"This kind of thing is common," Jupiter said. "The Cullinan diamond, for example, was the largest diamond in the world until it was split into nine large stones and many more small ones. They are now part of the British Crown Jewels."

"Even the diamonds in the Aurora Necklace were originally one," Bob added, his eyes still fixed on the book.

"That's not an explanation," Pete said, but then let the subject rest. "Anyway... so it's about a red glitter headband. Do you think Pablo was successful in his search?"

The First Investigator shook his head. "Then he would have taken his collection of documents off the pinboard."

"Where did Caligarov's handbook come from anyway?" asked Bob. "Why did it turn up if Caligarov had disappeared?"

"I don't know," Jupiter replied. "Nightingale only said he bought it at an auction. I think he, as a magician, knew the story of the missing tiara. Perhaps it never occurred to him that there might be a clue hidden in the handbook. He was only interested in the book as a collector's item or as inspiration. What I find most puzzling, however, is the question of how Pablo came into possession of the handbook after Blond Wrestler stole it."

Before they could discuss this question further, they heard Aunt Mathilda calling for Jupiter outside.

"Goodness, your aunt," Pete groaned. "I'm sure she has work for us again."

But this time it was not about work. "Jupe! There's a visitor for you!" Together they left Headquarters through the Cold Gate. Aunt Mathilda and Quinn were standing in the salvage yard.

"Ah, there you are. This young man has been on the lookout for you for a while."

"Hi, Quinn!"

"I really need to talk to you!" the boy murmured to them with a poorly concealed sideways glance at Aunt Mathilda.

"I'm going," said Aunt Mathilda with a smile. "Jupe, will you please close the gate now? We close in five minutes."

"All right, Aunt Mathilda."

“And there’s dinner in an hour,” Aunt Mathilda added, giving Jupiter a penetrating look before turning and leaving.

When his aunt was out of earshot, Jupiter asked: “What happened, Quinn?”

“My mobile phone is gone. I know for a fact that I had it at the theatre when Pete discovered the secret hiding place. When I was back home, I didn’t have it anymore.”

Bob frowned. “Maybe you lost it when we rushed to help the walker. We did quite a bit of running then.”

Quinn shook his head resolutely. “I went back and searched the whole way, twice. Besides, it doesn’t fall out of my pocket, even when I run. Someone must have stolen it from me.”

At first Bob thought Quinn was exaggerating, but then he realized what Quinn was getting at. “You don’t mean—”

“The walker?” cried Pete.

Quinn nodded. “I helped him up. He was holding on to me pretty tight. It wouldn’t have been difficult for him to take the phone from me.”

“I can’t imagine that,” Pete said shaking his head. “After all, we saved the man from Blond Wrestler! Do you really think he’s going to steal your mobile phone as a thank-you?”

“Geez, Pete!” cried Bob. “Don’t you get it? Blond Wrestler only pretended to beat up the walker! It was a diversion—and a double one at that! Blond Wrestler was able to steal the handbook, and the walker got hold of the mobile phone!”

“The mobile phone that Blond Wrestler wanted to get last night,” Jupiter said. “Bob is right, it can’t be a coincidence. Your walker and Blond Wrestler were working together. I wouldn’t be surprised if that walker is Steven Sullivan—the man Blond Wrestler went to see, the man he was working with when he robbed Nightingale. That’s why the walker didn’t press charges. He’s been playing you. Now Blond Wrestler has Pablo’s number—which means that Pablo is in great danger!”

## 14. Double Surveillance

“Why is there great danger?” asked Pete. “Blond Wrestler has the number, but it won’t do him any good.”

“It may very well bring him something,” Jupiter objected. “Blond Wrestler is cunning, we know that. If I were him, I would proceed as follows—I would send a text message to Pablo, for example: ‘Pablo, you’re in danger! I found out what happened. Ray Layton is on your tail, he knows where you’re hiding. We have to meet! ...’ Then I would give a time and place. If Pablo is really hiding somewhere from Blond Wrestler and is afraid, he will respond by turning up at the agreed meeting place. He’ll think you sent him the message, Quinn.”

Quinn turned pale. “Then we have to do something!”

“We could send him a warning,” Pete said. “Do you know Pablo’s mobile number by heart?”

With his lips pressed together, Quinn shook his head.

“Then we have only one option,” Jupiter said. “We have to monitor Blond Wrestler. He hasn’t had the phone in his possession for long—for about two hours. Should he leave for a secret meeting place, he won’t do so until tonight at the earliest, I think.”

Bob looked up at the sky where a few feathery clouds were turning red in the sunset. “It’s evening.”

“Then let’s not waste time. Pete and Bob, go home and come back with the cars.”

“With both?” Pete asked.

“Yes, because if Blond Wrestler is working with Steven Sullivan, we need to be able to shadow both of them. Hurry up, fellas!”

Pete and Bob went on their way. Jupiter locked the gate to the salvage yard behind them. Then he hurried to gather up the walkie-talkies. Quinn stood in amazement in the salvage yard and watched as Jupiter hurried back and forth, disappeared into this strange refrigerator and reappeared.

Ten minutes later, the First Investigator was ready. “It’s best you go home, Quinn. You can’t do anything now anyway.”

However, Quinn shook his head. “I want to come with you.”

“Is that so? I thought Blond Wrestler scared you.”

“He does, but I want to help Pablo.”

Jupiter hesitated. On the one hand, he was not enthusiastic about Quinn’s idea. On the other hand, if they were travelling in two cars, an extra person might be a good idea. Then no one would be alone in a car.

“All right, but I can’t guarantee you that it’s not dangerous.”

Quinn swallowed, but nodded bravely. “Okay.”

Just then Pete and Bob came back. Jupiter and Quinn left the salvage yard through the Green Gate, one of their secret entrances.

“Quinn’s coming with us,” Jupiter explained as he handed Pete and Bob their walkie-talkies. “Can I take your car, Bob?”

Bob nodded and handed the First Investigator the car keys to his rickety yellow Beetle before joining Pete himself in his red MG.

“Just follow me and stay tuned!” Jupiter said, got into the Beetle and drove off towards Pacific Palisades.

Here and there, the ocean flashed between the houses. The sea looked like liquid lead in the light of the setting sun. By the time they reached the street where Sullivan lived, the sun had disappeared behind the horizon and dusk was setting in.

The Dodge Diplomat was still there. Jupiter drove down the road so far that he could just see the house and the car in the rear-view mirror. Then he stopped at the side of the road, turned off the engine and picked up the walkie-talkie.

“First here, come in.”

“Third here, I see the Dodge and I see you. Should we park at the intersection?”

“That would probably be best. Sullivan lives in house number four.”

“Good,” Bob said.

Jupiter didn’t see Pete’s MG, but he knew they had Sullivan’s house in view from across the street.

“What now?” asked Quinn anxiously.

“Now it’s a matter of waiting.”

Slowly it was getting dark. Children who had been playing in the driveways were called inside. The lights went on in the houses, also in number four. So someone was home, and that was a good sign.

Jupiter relaxed a little and opened a bag of chips he had had the presence of mind to take from Headquarters. Without taking his eyes off the rear-view mirror, he began to eat them slowly.

“I’m supposed to be home for dinner now,” he muttered. “Aunt Mathilda won’t like that at all. Do you want some chips?”

Quinn refused. He was too nervous to be hungry. His fingers played incessantly with coins, his house key, his pocket knife and his handkerchief. He made everything continually disappear and reappear while he kept an eye on Sullivan’s front door in the wing mirror.

Jupiter began to tell him about the progress of their investigation. He told him about Caligarov and the Blood Tiara.

Then he suddenly saw Pete strolling down the street, a cap pulled down over his face. Jupiter reached for the walkie-talkie.

“First here. Bob, what is Pete doing?”

“Third here. He just wanted to have a quick look.”

Pete turned around again and disappeared from their field of vision. Shortly afterwards, he spoke into the walkie-talkie: “Guess who you can watch through the window when you walk down the street?”

“Blond Wrestler and Sullivan,” Jupiter said.

“Right... and Sullivan is our walker from this afternoon. You were right, Jupe.”

“Anything else?” asked Jupiter.

“They are talking to each other. Blond Wrestler is restless. He paces up and down all the time. Could be that something will happen soon.”

Pete was right. Twenty minutes later, a ray of light fell onto the street in front of house number four. A shadow appeared in it. Then the door was closed and Blond Wrestler walked with energetic steps to his car and got in.

“Here we go!” gasped Quinn.

“First here,” Jupiter spoke into the walkie-talkie. “Quinn and I will take up the pursuit. You stay here and monitor Sullivan.”

“Are you sure, Jupe?” asked Bob.

“Absolutely. We don’t know what they’re up to. I don’t want us chasing Blond Wrestler to the nearest fast food restaurant and back while Sullivan leaves for the real mission. You guys stay here. I’ll call you when the walkie-talkie range is exhausted. Over!”

Jupiter pressed the walkie-talkie into Quinn’s hand, turned the car key and drove off. With as much distance as possible, he followed the Dodge. Soon, Blond Wrestler turned onto the busy coastal road.

“I hope we don’t lose him,” Quinn said worriedly.

Jupiter shook his head. “Don’t worry. I’m quite familiar with this route. This yellow Beetle is conspicuous, but in this traffic, we’ll be just two white dots among many in Blond Wrestler’s rear-view mirror. He won’t notice us.”

However, Jupiter’s relief did not last long because soon, the Dodge left the coastal road and drove into the mountains. The First Investigator had to increase the distance to avoid attracting attention.

The area quickly became lonely. Jupiter knew the road they were on. It wound over a ridge north of Santa Monica towards the San Fernando Valley, roughly parallel to Rustic Canyon, just a bit further east. It was the most densely forested area in the region.

About five minutes after they passed the last houses at the foot of the mountains, the Dodge rolled right into a car park from which a hiking trail led into the forested valley. Now in the evening, the place was completely deserted.

Jupiter turned off the headlights, shifted into neutral so that the engine noise wouldn’t give them away, and let himself roll as far as he could towards the car park. He came to a stop at the side of the road behind a tree that offered a little cover.

“Jupiter, I’m not comfortable with this,” Quinn whispered.

“Neither do I,” the First Investigator confessed and called Bob on his mobile phone.

“Jupe!” Bob spoke up. “Are you all right? Where are you?”

“North—where Westridge Road turns into West Mandeville Fire Road,” Jupiter said. “Blond Wrestler just pulled into a car park where a hiking trail starts—the Westridge Trailhead. It’s so dark here I can’t... wait, now I see him! The interior lights of his car have just come on. He gets out... looks around... and turns on a flashlight. Good thing, otherwise we’d lose sight of him. He’s heading into the woods now. I see the light of his flashlight. He’s quite determined and seems to know exactly where he’s going.”

“Nothing is happening at our place,” Bob said. “Sullivan is still at home. Should we join you?”

“No. We don’t know what exactly they are up to. Better stay at your post.”

“Jupiter,” Quinn murmured, “you can hardly see the flashlight anymore. There, now the light has completely disappeared into the forest!”

“Don’t go chasing after him!” warned Bob on the other end. “With Blond Wrestler alone in the forest at night, that’s not a good idea.”

But Jupiter already regretted not having followed the man immediately. Now he was out of sight and they no longer knew where he was. “We’ll be careful,” Jupiter promised. “I’ll check in every fifteen minutes from now on. If I don’t, something’s gone wrong and you go get help, all right?”

“All right,” Bob said anxiously.

They compared their watches and made a time for the next call. Then Jupiter hung up. Outside, the last remnants of twilight slowly disappeared on the horizon and the starry night fell. It was unreal quiet out here.

“Now what?” asked Quinn anxiously.

“I don’t know. Maybe we should have a look at the car.”

Quinn was startled. “What if Blond Wrestler comes back?”

“Then we can see that in time by the glow of his flashlight.”

“I don’t know. What if—” Quinn interrupted himself. He had seen something and was staring through the windscreen. “There!” he whispered. “Someone’s coming!”

In front of them on the road, a dark figure moved slowly and carefully. It was heading for the car park. But under the trees that lined the road, they could not make out who it was.

Then the figure reached the car park entrance where there were no trees.

“Pablo!” gasped Quinn. “It’s Pablo! He’s heading for the car park! We’ve got to warn him! Quick!”

Jupiter hesitated. “As long as we don’t know exactly where Blond Wrestler is—”

“No matter where he is, we can still reach Pablo first,” Quinn was convinced. Before Jupiter could contradict, Quinn had opened the passenger door and jumped out of the car.

“Wait!” shouted Jupiter, but by then Quinn had already started running. Jupiter stayed in the car and watched with a pounding heart as the boy ran towards the magician. Maybe Quinn was right and it was best to get to Pablo before Blond Wrestler came back. If Jupiter followed Quinn, he and Pablo could get in quickly and they would be over the hills in a minute.

Jupiter made a decision and reached for the ignition key.

Then someone knocked on his side window.

Jupiter was so frightened that his heart almost stopped. He looked out and gazed into the muzzle of a gun pointed at him.

Blond Wrestler’s grin shone in the silvery light of the stars. “Tsk, tsk, tsk,” Ray Layton went on, shaking his head reprovingly.



## 15. In the Forest at Night

Layton said nothing, but only gestured with a slight movement of his head for Jupe to get out. His gaze was so icy cold that the First Investigator complied.

“So, my friend,” Blond Wrestler murmured softly as Jupiter stood next to him. “You keep your mouth shut now. If you somehow warn those two over there, that will be the last thing you do. Do you understand me? It’s enough if you nod.”

Jupiter nodded. His heart was pounding in his throat. Inspector Cotta’s words came back to him—Ray Layton was prone to violent outbursts and does not shy away from brutality. The First Investigator had no doubt that Layton would harm him if he did not obey.

Layton pressed the barrel of his gun against Jupe’s neck and pushed him with it to the side of the road. There they stood behind a tree and waited. Layton looked completely calm.

In the silence of the night, Jupiter heard excited whispers—Quinn was talking to Pablo. Jupiter could not really hear what was being said. Hurried footsteps approached. Jupiter thought feverishly how he could warn them without Layton noticing, but he couldn’t think of anything.

Eventually, it was already too late. Quinn and Pablo Rodriguez reached the Beetle. Pablo looked like Jupiter had seen him on the video of Mrs Kato—short and wiry, with a moustache and shoulder-length grey hair. Now he wasn’t wearing a black suit, but an old pair of jeans and a worn-out jumper. So he did not look like a magician, but simply like an elderly man.

Quinn was about to pull open the car door when he noticed that Jupiter was not at the driver’s seat.

The First Investigator felt the gun being pressed into his neck and involuntarily he stepped forward.

When Quinn heard the footsteps, he whirled around and let out a strangled cry: “Jupiter!”

“Take it easy, you two, or you’ll have seen the last of this fat kid here,” Layton said with a calmness and casualness that made Jupiter shudder.

Quinn and Pablo did not move from their positions.

“Good evening, Steven,” Layton said. “Long time no see. You’ve become older.”

“Steven?” Jupiter repeated and all of a sudden, it became apparent to him that this was something he missed while trying to unravel the case. However, Layton nudged the gun unwillingly into Jupe’s neck so he remained silent.

“Ray...” Pablo stammered. “I... I didn’t know...”

“You can tell me what you knew and what you didn’t know in a moment. Now you three come along nicely. You two go ahead. Nothing will happen to this fat kid as long as you do what I say. Let’s go to the car park!”

Silently, they started to move. No one dared to speak. Only Quinn whimpered softly. Jupiter felt sorry for him. The First Investigator cursed himself inwardly for taking Quinn with him. If anything went wrong here, Jupiter was responsible. A bitter laugh rose in him. As if everything hadn’t already gone wrong! A simple surveillance had turned into a life-threatening situation. Pete’s words came back to him—if Jupiter saw no potential for complications, an hour later, they’ll find themselves in very big trouble.

Layton directed them across the car park, past the Dodge to the forest path. He switched on his flashlight. The dancing light cast deep shadows in the forest. Beyond the narrow path, the world sank into darkness.

The path led gently but steadily downhill into the valley. Still no one spoke a word. Sometimes some animal would scurry through the undergrowth. Quinn flinched fearfully at every sound.

The trees receded, revealing a clearing where a wooden cabin stood. It was probably used by rangers. Layton directed them towards it. "Open the door!" he ordered.

Pablo, who was in front, opened the door. It was dark inside, but on a shelf there was a light in the shape of a paraffin lamp, except that it was electric and used LEDs. Layton switched it on. Icy white-blue light illuminated the inside of the cabin. It was sparsely furnished with a table, three chairs and a bed. A tattered jacket hung on a hook on the wall. There was nothing more.

"Sit down!" he ordered.

The three sat down on the chairs. Roughly, one after the other, their arms were pulled behind their backs. Jupiter felt the narrow plastic band of a cable tie cutting into his wrists. Layton took the mobile phones from them and placed them on the table. Once Pablo, Quinn, Jupiter were all tied up and sitting in the chairs next to each other, Ray Layton stood up in front of them and smiled with satisfaction. However, he only looked at the magician.

"Steven, Steven, Steven," he said, shaking his head. "How nice that we should meet again. It didn't help at all that you call yourself Pablo Rodriguez now, did you notice? I found you anyway. You weren't expecting me so soon, were you? You didn't think I'd be out for another three years. You know how? I was nice to the police. At some point, I realized that once I was released I'd probably be under surveillance as long as the loot stayed missing, and that I could never have turned Nightingale's coins into cash unnoticed anyway. So I betrayed the hiding place, and was given a few years of freedom. Generous, isn't it? But you know what freedom feels like. You did everything in your power to make me look like the mastermind when you were the one who thought it all up."

"But Ray," Pablo said fearfully. "I couldn't do anything about the judge's sentence!"

"You testified against me!" thundered Layton, stepping very close to Pablo. "You betrayed me... and used me... and you did it from the beginning. I didn't realize that until much later. You needed someone to do the dirty work so that you could have all the loot. I know that it wasn't money or coins that you wanted. It was something else entirely. I only found out what it was after I had revealed the hiding place of the loot. That's when they told me something was missing—a book... This book." Ray Layton pulled Caligarov's handbook out of his back trouser pocket and slammed it down on the table. "So, my old friend, you're going to tell me what this is all about."

"Nothing at all!" cried Pablo, with beads of sweat glistening on his forehead. "It's the handbook of a famous magician. I just took it from Nightingale."

"And why?"

"Because I'm interested in it! There are old magic tricks in it! Nothing more. It's nothing more, Ray, really, you couldn't do anything with it, and I'm really sorry about what happened then. I didn't mean to—"

"You're lying," Layton stated in a matter-of-fact manner and took a step to the side so that he was now facing Quinn. He pointed his gun at the boy's head. "If you don't tell the truth now, your young friend will pay for it."

"It's about diamonds!" shouted Quinn so loudly that his voice rolled over. "About diamonds, about a jewel, the Blood Tiara, it's lost, and the handbook says where it is..."

maybe.”

“What kind of diamonds?” Layton asked.

“I... I don’t really know,” Quinn sobbed and began to cry and shake. “Please don’t hurt me, please!”

Jupe was heartbroken to see Quinn like this, but Pablo, who also had horror written all over his face, did nothing.

“Leave Quinn alone,” Jupiter heard himself say, and his own voice sounded amazingly calm. “I will tell you what you want to know... but stop threatening Quinn.”

Smiling, Layton turned to the First Investigator. “Well then, hero. Trying to impose conditions on me is very dangerous. Quite a few other people have failed at that.”

“Please,” Jupiter added, but tried not to sound too humble.

“All right. Then talk. By the way, who are you, anyway?”

“My name is Jupiter Jones. My friends and I are investigators.”

“Ah yes, you gave my mate Sullivan your card. Investigators, then.”

“We were assigned to investigate the disappearance of Pablo Rodriguez.” Jupiter told him in brief what they had found out. “I suspect that there is a clue to the whereabouts of the tiara in Igor Caligarov’s handbook, but I haven’t had a chance to check it out yet.”

“Very well,” Layton said with satisfaction and turned back to Pablo. “What do you say to that, old friend?”

The magician hung his head. “It’s true what he says... Everything.”

“So where did you hide the tiara? Or have you already made money out of it? No, you haven’t, or you wouldn’t be living this miserable life in your silly magic theatre.”

“I never found it!” Pablo affirmed. “Really, I don’t know where it is. I was looking for it for years, trying to find out where Caligarov disappeared to back then. In my search for clues, I finally came across the handbook that had turned up in an attic in Vienna sixty years ago. I don’t know how it got there. Eventually, it ended up with a private collector. After his death, the collection was auctioned off and I found out that Nightingale was the buyer. The book is the only lead there is to Caligarov. All other Caligarov hunters have long since given up the search for him. I thought once I had the book, I’d find the tiara. That’s why I... persuaded you to break into Nightingale’s.”

Layton laughed out.

“But there’s nothing in the book!” continued Pablo. “I found no clue. I was wrong. It was a mistake—a big mistake. Why should Caligarov write down the hiding place of the tiara? That doesn’t make any sense, but I only realized that later. Please, Ray, you have to believe me, I’m sorry, I—”

A whirring sound made Pablo, Quinn and Jupiter jump together. One of the mobile phones on the table rang.

“This is yours,” Layton stated, turning to Jupiter and glancing at the display. “Pete. One of your investigator friends?”

Jupiter nodded apprehensively.

In no time Layton was behind him and cut his bonds with a knife. “You go on and reassure your friend that everything is all right. You don’t give any hints where you are or what’s going on.” He pointed his gun at Quinn, who pressed his lips together with tears in his eyes. “Do you understand me?”

Jupiter nodded, stood up, reached for the phone and answered the call.

## 16. No Potential for Complications

“Something must have happened, Bob,” Pete muttered as he sat in the MG at the end of the street where Sullivan lived. He had his mobile phone pressed to his ear. It had rung six times already and Jupiter didn’t answer. “Jupe is five minutes over time. That’s not like him. We should call the police—”

Then the call was picked up. “Hi, Pete.”

“Jupe! Man, what’s going on? You said you were going to report back!”

“I was just about to... every twenty minutes, that’s what we agreed.”

“We agreed on every fifteen minutes!”

“Really?”

“Yes, indeed.” Pete frowned. “Jupe, is everything all right?”

“Yes, everything is fine. Layton is still in the forest. Nothing else has happened.”

“Really? It’s not like you to forget our agreement.”

“Maybe you remembered it wrongly.”

“I don’t know, Jupe...”

“Pete, calm down. There is no potential for complications here.”

Pete’s eyes widened. “You... you mean ‘no potential for complications’ in a classic three-investigators case?”

“That’s right, Pete,” Jupiter replied cheerfully.

“For goodness’ sake, Jupe, you can’t talk freely, can you? Where are you now?”

Jupiter hesitated imperceptibly. Then he laughed as if Pete had made a funny remark and said: “In the forest! You should come here with Cotta. I’m sure he’ll find something interesting. Meanwhile, I’ll let you know if anything happens. See you then!” Jupe hung up abruptly and Pete turned pale.

“What did he say, Pete?” asked Bob anxiously. “Come on, tell me!”

“Call Cotta, Bob! Jupe and Quinn are in trouble.”

Jupiter handed the mobile phone back to Layton who took a step towards him and asked threateningly: “What was that about the forest? What did he ask you?”

Jupiter looked straight into his eyes. “Pete asked where I am. I just told him that I was in the forest. That’s all.”

“And who is Cotta?”

“His dog. I suggested that he bring Cotta into the forest to sniff around.”

Layton narrowed his eyes, obviously not quite sure if he should believe Jupiter. “Where are your friends now?”

“At home.”

“They sit at home while you followed me?” Layton poked Jupiter in front of the chest, causing him to stagger back in the chair. Then Layton reached for his own mobile phone.

“Sullivan, it’s me. Those kids you met in Rustic Canyon—there may be two of them watching you. Don’t laugh, these fellows are to be taken seriously. See if I’m right... but inconspicuous, you hear?”

He hung up and looked at Jupiter intently and thoughtfully. “You seem to be a clever fellow. You’ve figured out all these things in one day that took Steven many years. Such a

sharp mind is useful—extremely useful.” He reached for the handbook and thrust it into Jupiter’s hand. “So tell me where the jewel is.”

Jupiter stared at him in amazement. “Excuse me?”

“You shall read this book and tell me where the Blood Tiara is hidden! You have one hour. Make an effort.” Without taking his eyes off Jupiter, Layton pointed the gun at Quinn. He smiled. “You know what happens if you don’t.”

“But... but how am I supposed to find out? Mr Rodriguez has had years to study the book. He knows Igor Caligarov’s story inside out! If he hasn’t found anything, how am I supposed to do it?”

“Yes, he had many years to do it,” Layton said and pointed to Pablo. Then he pointed to Jupiter. “I’ll give you one hour. Read!”

When Jupiter did not immediately comply, Layton grabbed him by the back of the neck and pushed his face brutally down onto the book. “Read!”

Jupiter opened the book. He felt Layton’s gaze on him, but didn’t dare look up. Slowly he turned page after page. The forest cabin was dead silent. Only Quinn let out a quiet sob now and then. Jupiter tried to concentrate. Igor Caligarov’s tiny handwriting was barely decipherable. The drawings blurred before his eyes. He had to pull himself together!

There was no introductory text at all. On the first double-page spread, a magic trick was described in which a person was stretched out on his back and floating in the air. Jupiter looked at the drawing which showed a complicated pole construction. A person was lying on it, half-covered with a cloth so that the construction itself could not be seen. Jupiter read a few sentences, but then turned the page.

The next two double pages contained detailed drawings of the linkage needed for the trick. There were arrows with tiny lettering that Jupiter could not read with the best will in the world.

Next came a card trick. Here there was a lot of text, the main point was to distract the audience while the magician exchanged the pack of cards for another. The anecdote the magician was supposed to tell—a story about the Russian tsar’s court—was written down word for word. It was possible that a clue was hidden here. Maybe Jupiter would even find it sooner or later, but in this cabin, under time pressure and in mortal danger, he could hardly think straight.

He continued to turn the pages. Now came an act where Caligarov first put a lump of coal on a table. Then he used a knife to stab his palm hard enough that it bled. He let several drops of blood drip onto the coal. Suddenly red light rose from the coal, like a sunrise. The whole thing was labelled ‘dawn’. It wasn’t explained in more detail and Jupiter didn’t really understand the trick either.

Then came the famous elephant act. The sketch showed the elephant and the double cloth thrown over it. Jupe read precise instructions on how the white cloth had to be so that it would easily slide off the black one without dragging it along.

Next, another card trick. Then a white rabbit that became two. A magic cauldron from which a different coloured liquid came with each pouring, first a red, then a green, then a blue. Then the famous ‘sawing a woman in half’ trick, where the woman was locked in a coffin-like box with her head and feet sticking out the ends. The box was sawn and the two parts pushed apart.

So it went on and on until Jupiter had reached the end of the book. He didn’t dare lift his eyes. He didn’t want to admit that he hadn’t the faintest idea where a clue was supposed to be hidden in the book.

Of the hour Layton had given him, perhaps only ten minutes had passed. So he still had plenty of time, but would that do him any good? Probably Pablo was right and there was no clue to the tiara at all. It was all a big mistake, but that would not satisfy Layton.

The ringing of Layton's mobile made Jupiter flinch. Layton picked up and listened in silence for a few seconds. Then he said: "Follow them!"

He hung up and went to Jupiter.

The blow came completely unexpectedly. It hit Jupiter right in the face. His head flew to the side and he fell off the chair, slammed his forehead against Quinn's chair post before he crashed to the floor. Stars danced before his eyes and for a moment, he thought he couldn't breathe. His face was numb, warm blood ran down his nose from a laceration on his forehead.

"You said your friends were home," he heard Layton's voice as if through cotton wool somewhere above him. "That was a lie. Don't ever lie to me again." Layton spoke calmly.

Jupe dared to turn his head. Layton stood over him, his face pale as a skull in the glow of the LED lamp. He lashed out with his right foot to kick at Jupiter. Instinctively, the First Investigator cringed and tried to protect his head.

"Ray!" Pablo shouted and Layton's foot paused in the air. "Leave the boy alone, he has nothing to do with this! Please!"

Layton stepped back. "Keep reading!" he ordered, and Jupiter struggled to get up, sat back on the chair and with trembling fingers picked up the book that had fallen on the floor. His face throbbed hotly with pain. Blood dripped onto the open pages. He looked for a handkerchief but found none, and finally pressed the sleeve of his sweatshirt against his forehead.

Without being able to concentrate in the least on Caligarov's notes, he watched as the drops of blood first shimmered like pearls on the page with the strange coal magic trick before being absorbed by the old, dry paper.

The next blow also came completely unexpectedly. Only this time it was not Layton who delivered it. It was a thought that hit him, so unexpectedly and powerfully that his heart began to race.

Jupiter's fingers tightened and he hoped fervently that Layton didn't notice anything. His eyes fixed on the pages without really seeing them. He reconsidered his theory, but he found no fault.

Now, he was pretty sure he knew where the Blood Tiara was!

## 17. Quinn's Magic Trick

"That was a huge mistake, Bob," Pete wailed as he crept through the dark forest. "A huge mistake!"

"Now pull yourself together, Pete!" admonished Bob. "Yes, it was a huge mistake, but we made it. Now we have to see how we can get out of this mess."

They had quickly found the car park where the Dodge Diplomat was parked, likewise the beginning of the hiking trail that led into the forest. Pete was sure that Jupiter was here somewhere. His hint on the phone had been quite clear, but where? True, there was a path they were following, but in the beam of a flashlight, it was easy to miss turnoffs. It was possible that they were already heading in the wrong direction. Pete was no longer even sure if they would easily find their way back to the road. The forest was dark and impenetrable and full of eerie sounds.

Something rustled. Pete and Bob stopped instantly and Pete switched off the flashlight. The darkness enveloped them and their hearing suddenly seemed to sharpen.

"Those are footsteps!" whispered Pete. "There's someone there!"

"Shhh!" Bob hissed.

The footsteps came closer... paused... and they came closer again. The rustling grew louder, branches cracked, as if someone had gone off the path and was now running through the undergrowth. They heard a suppressed curse... then nothing more. There was silence, for minutes.

Pete and Bob hardly dared to breathe.

Suddenly, twenty metres away from them, a pale light flashed between the trees. It was a mobile phone display! It was reflected in the thick glasses of a man they had seen before—Sullivan, the walker! He dialled a number. A moment later, his voice was heard.

"Sullivan here. I followed those two like you said. They seem to know exactly where you are. They drove straight to the car park and disappeared into the woods, but now I've lost sight of them. Their light was suddenly gone. It could be that they are already very close to you."

Pete and Bob could not hear the answer. Then Sullivan said: "All right," and hung up. He used the light of the display to find his way back to the path, which he fortunately only found when he was already a good distance from Pete and Bob. The two investigators waited until they were sure Sullivan could no longer hear them.

"Follow him," Bob whispered, and they followed the pale glow that hovered like a will-o'-the-wisp among the trees deeper and deeper into the forest.

After Layton hung up, he looked at Jupiter for a long time. His gaze was expressionless, and when he spoke, he sounded like a teacher reprimanding a naughty child. "You have lied to me once more. No, worse, you have deceived me. Didn't I tell you to convince your friends on the phone that everything was all right?"

"I did," Jupiter replied. "You were standing next to me. You heard every word."

"So how come they know exactly where we are?"

Jupiter shrugged his shoulders. "They are investigators. They would have figured it out."

Layton slapped him so hard in the face that Jupiter almost fell off his chair again. The blow made his cheek go numb and for seconds, a high-pitched whimpering in his ear drowned out all other sounds.

“Don’t ever lie to me again!” This time it was not fear that rose in Jupiter. It was anger—which surprised him most of all. Face burning, he turned to Layton and said: “All right. I’ll tell you the truth now—I know where the Blood Tiara is.”

With narrowed eyes, Layton stared at Jupe as if trying to read his face to see if he was really telling the truth. “You’re lying.”

“I’m not.”

“How did you find out so quickly?”

“That was your assignment, wasn’t it?”

“Where is it?”

Jupiter stood up and threw the handbook open on the table. The double page with the coal magic trick was visible. “Here you are—on this page is the solution to the puzzle.”

Layton read the text. “That means nothing to me.”

“Too bad.”

Layton raised his arm and was about to take another swing.

“If you touch me again, I will never tell you where the tiara is.”

For a second, Layton’s face was full of anger. Then he suddenly threw his head back and burst out laughing. “Brave fat kid! I’m afraid you don’t know what you’re talking about. You don’t know what pain is. You’ve never felt real pain in your life. In half an hour, you’ll be begging to tell me where the tiara is hidden. Let’s see if I’m still interested.”

“There,” Bob whispered. “There’s something!”

A white-blue glow had appeared between the trees. There stood a wooden cabin, with the cold light falling through the windows into the forest.

Pete and Bob were heading towards it, and suddenly noticed that the mobile phone light they had been following was no longer there.

“Where’s Sullivan?” murmured Pete.

“He should have entered the cabin,” Bob surmised.

“Shouldn’t we have seen that?”

“Not necessarily. The entrance seems to be on the other side.”

They crept as close to the cabin as they could without stepping into the clearing. Behind the windows, shadows moved along the wall.

“I’ll look through the window,” Pete whispered. “You stay here, okay?”

Bob nodded.

As quietly as possible, Pete approached the cabin, careful not to step on any branches lying around. Finally, he was close enough to look through a window. He saw Quinn, tied up in a chair. Next to him, Pablo, whom Pete recognized from the video, and Layton and Jupiter, standing eye to eye. Layton towered over the First Investigator by more than a head, and he looked furious.

A click very close to him made Pete cringe.

“So, my friend,” Sullivan said, stepping out of the shadows towards him with a gun in his hand. “You think you can outsmart me?” Then Sullivan raised his voice and spoke into the darkness. “You better get your butt over here, kid, if you don’t want your friend to get hurt!”

“Bob is no longer there,” Pete said.

“Don’t talk nonsense, I heard you whispering just now. He’s behind those trees.”



“He was behind the trees. He’s on his way back to the car park to bring the police, who have already been notified,” Pete said in a confident voice.

Sullivan seemed unsure whether to believe Pete. “In you go first,” he decided and directed Pete around the house to the entrance. There he knocked a short rhythm on the door. Footsteps could be heard, before the door was opened. Standing in front of them was Layton.

“Sullivan,” said the latter.

“I got one of them,” Sullivan said, pushing Pete rudely into the cabin.

“Jupe!” cried Pete, startled, when he saw the First Investigator close up. “Are you all right? You’re bleeding!”

“Shut up!” Layton snapped at Pete. “Where’s your friend?”

“Bob’s going to get the police,” Pete replied grimly. “They’ll be here in a few minutes!”

Layton looked questioningly at Sullivan.

“I don’t know if that’s true,” Sullivan said.

Then they suddenly heard footsteps from outside—from more than one person. Everyone listened.

It didn’t take Layton long to react. He grabbed Pete by the shoulder, pushed him onto the empty chair, forced his arms behind his back and tied him up with a cable tie. Since there was no more empty chair, Layton simply pushed Jupiter down onto his knees and tied his hands behind his back.

Then he switched off the lamp and the darkness of the forest spilled into the cabin.

“You don’t make a sound!” Layton hissed into the darkness. Then he opened the door. “Come on, Sullivan, let’s go see!”

The two men left the cabin.

Pete didn’t care about what Layton had said. “Quick, Jupe, we have to do something!”

“Good idea, Pete, but what?”

“Am I the First Investigator or are you? Just think of something!”

“We are tied up, Pete. That limits our radius of action significantly.”

“But we have to do something!” Pete insisted.

Then Quinn spoke up: “I have a suggestion. How about I make us disappear?”

When Bob heard the footsteps on the forest ground, a heavy stone fell from his heart. He left his cover and ran towards the sound. The beam of a flashlight hit him directly in the face.

“Bob Andrews,” he heard Inspector Cotta’s familiar voice. “Where are your friends?”

“Over there in the cabin. They have been caught and are being threatened. They are in great danger. You must do something!”

“Only Jupiter and Pete?” asked Cotta curtly.

“No. There are four of them altogether.”

“And who is holding them there?”

“Ray Layton and his friend Sullivan.”

“Layton,” Cotta growled. “I told you to keep your hands off the case...” Cotta interrupted himself. “I’ll deal with you later. Are they armed?”

“Yes,” Bob said.

Cotta quietly gave orders to his men. There were six of them in all. They switched off their flashlights and surrounded the cabin. Cotta told Bob to wait at a distance, but Bob only stepped back a few metres. He couldn’t just take cover now.

Then suddenly a loud voice shouted: “We know you are there! Withdraw immediately! We have hostages!”

"It's Layton," Bob said, fear tightening his throat.

"Damn it!" cursed Cotta. "Damn, damn, damn! Johnson, call dispatch. We've got a hostage situation. Tell them to send in the task force."

Bob's mobile rang.

"Bob Andrews!" the inspector hissed at him. "Would you please—"

"It's Jupiter," Bob said, befuddled, and answered. "Jupe?" he whispered.

"Tell Cotta he can strike at ease. Layton has no hostages. We're already out."

"Excuse me?"

Before Bob could get an explanation, Cotta snatched the phone out of his hand and spoke to Jupiter himself. Then he gave instructions to his men over the radio: "Turn on your lights. Blind them. Get them in your sights."

All at once the wooden cabin shone in the white light of the extremely bright police lamps. Layton and Sullivan froze like a deer caught in headlights. "Put down your weapons, Layton! Now!"

"We have hostages!" Sullivan repeated and rushed back into the cabin. A split-second later, a cry of horror echoed through the forest. "They're gone!"

"You can take my word for it, Layton!" cried Cotta. "The game is over!"

Five minutes later, Layton and Sullivan were led away in handcuffs. They had surrendered after realizing they had no chance. Four of Cotta's men took the two criminals back through the forest to the car park.

There was a rustling in the bushes and one after the other—Jupiter, Pete, Quinn and Pablo Rodriguez—stepped into the clearing. Bob ran towards them, relieved. "Jupe! Pete! How did you do that?"

"Not us," Jupiter said. "It was Quinn. He freed us."

Bob looked at Quinn wide-eyed. "How did you do that?"

Quinn smiled wryly. "I'm just a magician's apprentice." Then he showed Bob his empty right hand. He closed it, turned it once, opened it again—and a small pocket knife lay on his palm. "With this, I cut the cable ties, and then we stormed out through the window."

Bob was thrilled. "But where did you get the knife?"

"I've been carrying it with me since Layton attacked me the first night. When he tied me up earlier, I had the knife in my hand. But if a magician doesn't want something to be found—it won't be."

Pablo approached the boy from behind and patted him on the shoulder with a smile. "My talented student. I am proud of you... in fact, all of you."

"Not so, for me," said Inspector Cotta, stepping towards them, crossing his arms and looking at The Three Investigators so angrily that for a moment, Pete was more afraid of him than of Layton.

"Uh-oh," he whispered softly. "Now there's trouble."

"Indeed, Pete Crenshaw," said Cotta, who obviously had very good ears. "Now there's trouble."

## 18. The Secret of the Blood Tiara

Forty pairs of big children's eyes looked at Jupiter, Pete and Bob. Mrs Thompson and Mrs Kato's classes had been listening to The Three Investigators for the last half hour. A week had passed since Layton and Sullivan had been arrested and The Three Investigators had solved the mystery of the missing magician... and as promised, they were now reporting back. They had toned down the most exciting parts far enough that they were no longer so scary.

However, the children were much less interested in Layton's violent outbursts than in the Blood Tiara. Jupiter had kept the solution to this puzzle from them until now.

"Where is the 'stiara' now?" a boy wanted to know.

"It's called a tiara," he was corrected by Angelina, the class monitor.

"It is in the treasury of a European royal family," Jupiter said.

"Huh?" the boy asked. "I don't understand."

"That's what I thought," Jupe said, "but I will explain it to you. I read this magician's handbook. There were all sorts of tricks in it, as I've already told you—the one with the elephant and the one with the floating woman and so on. Even when I read through it for the first time, one trick seemed a bit strange to me. Can you guess which one it was?"

"The one with the lump of coal and the sunrise!" a girl shouted excitedly.

"Exactly... and why?"

"Because it's funny!"

"Right. It just didn't seem like a real magic trick to me... but I didn't immediately realize there was a hidden clue. Do you know what diamonds are made of?"

"Made of glass?" one boy guessed.

"Nonsense," said another. "Diamonds aren't made of glass. Diamonds are made of... uh... diamond!"

"True, but what is it exactly?" Jupiter took over. "I'll tell you anyway. Diamonds are made of carbon. Carbon is an element. When you compress carbon hard enough, it becomes diamonds, and that's what happens inside the earth. There, the pressure and heat are so high that carbon can be compressed into diamonds, which then—if you're lucky—come to the earth's surface millions of years later."

"And what does that have to do with the tiara?" a girl grumbled.

"Exactly," Pete interjected and grinned. "Nobody is really interested in how diamonds are created, Jupe."

Ignoring Pete's remark, Jupe continued: "In the trick described, a lump of coal is placed on a table at the beginning. Coal is carbon! That's the clue that this is actually about diamonds. Then the magician pricks his hand and blood drips onto the lump of coal."

"A red diamond!" a boy shouted excitedly. "The Blood Tiara!"

"Right... and then red light rises, floating in the air like a sunrise. Caligarov has specially written the word 'dawn' next to it." Now all the children looked at him questioningly.

Instead of Jupiter, Bob continued: "There is another famous piece of jewellery called the 'Aurora Necklace'. A necklace is a valuable chain. We had read something about this

necklace in a book about famous diamonds. The Aurora Necklace is also set with red diamonds, and ‘aurora’ is the Latin word for ‘dawn’.”

By now, most of the children were frowning. They suspected the solution to the puzzle, but it wasn’t quite clear to them yet.

“The magic trick in Caligarov’s handbook describes a transformation,” Jupiter explained. “Blood transforms into dawn. This is a clue telling us that the Blood Tiara was transformed into the Aurora Necklace... What that means is that someone had used the diamonds from the Blood Tiara to create the Aurora Necklace.”

“Wow!” some of the children gasped.

Jupiter continued: “That night in the forest cabin, it was just a guess on my part, but when we were back home and safe, we did some research. The Aurora Necklace was made for a royal jubilee in the 1920s. Its most valuable gemstones are eight red diamonds. An expert agreed with us that it is very possible that the diamonds in the Aurora Necklace are exactly the same ones that had previously been part of the Blood Tiara.”

“Caligarov probably had them re-cut,” Pete took over the explanation. “In the Blood Tiara, the diamonds had a boat shape, but in the Aurora Necklace, they had a tear-drop shape.” He went to the whiteboard and drew the two shapes. “You see, if you round off one tip of the ‘boat’, you get a tear-drop.”

“Because they now looked different and were incorporated into a necklace, Caligarov was able to resell the red diamonds that were being searched for everywhere without anyone suspecting anything,” Bob said. “Under a new identity, he made up a story about the Aurora Necklace. He claimed that it came from the treasury of a maharaja and was centuries old. That was not true, of course. Just as people had believed him that he had been a great magician at the Russian tsar’s court, they also believed him in the story about the Aurora Necklace. Caligarov was a real master at that—making people believe something that wasn’t true at all.”

“And what became of Igor Caligarov?” asked Mrs Kato, the teacher.

“We’ll probably never know,” Bob said. “He took on a new identity and went into hiding. Where and under what name he spent the rest of his life has remained his secret. Also, we are not able to determine how his handbook turned up in an attic in Vienna. In any case, the Aurora Necklace, which had once been the Blood Tiara, now belongs to a European queen.”

“We suspect that Caligarov did not want the secret of the tiara to perish with his death and that is why he wrote the clue in his handbook,” Jupiter said. “In a sense, this is one of the greatest tricks of his career as a magician.”

“But why didn’t Pablo the Magician find out the secret himself?” Angelina wanted to know.

“Because he only wondered where Igor Caligarov disappeared to back then,” Jupiter explained. “He tried for years to follow Caligarov’s trail to find the tiara, but he never focussed specifically on the tiara itself. He didn’t suspect that it held a secret all its own, otherwise he might have been able to uncover it.”

“Does he have to go to prison now?”

“That is not yet certain. He has already been punished for the break-in at Nightingale’s, but it could be that the case will be reopened. However, Ray ‘Blond Wrestler’ Layton will definitely spend a few more years in prison.”

This seemed to relieve the children a lot. Fittingly, at the end of the story, the school bell rang and, with all the important questions answered, the children immediately rushed out of the classroom.

After silence had fallen, Mrs Kato turned to The Three Investigators. “Thank you so much for coming by. The children and I really wanted to know what happened to the magician... but we didn’t expect such an adventurous story behind it.”

“Neither did we,” Pete confessed, glancing at his watch. “Now we have to go, unfortunately.”

Mrs Kato nodded in understanding. “You’re busy, aren’t you? A new case?”

Pete nodded, fatefully. “In a way. Our new assignment is to pick up rubbish in the city park. You see, Inspector Cotta has ordered us to do community service—for a month.”

“And then it’s straight on to the salvage yard,” said Bob. “Jupiter’s aunt was pretty mad because he hadn’t kept his promise to join his family for dinner yet again. So he has to tidy up the salvage yard as well... and we’re both helping, of course.”

The teacher smiled pityingly. “You were such brave investigators and now you are being punished for your heroic deeds. Of course, you were also quite reckless. This adventure will certainly teach you a lesson, won’t it?”

The Three Investigators nodded.

“Most definitely,” Jupiter added. “The lesson we learn from this is that we have to try a little harder on the next case... so that in the future, there is no potential for complications!”